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# **NUMEN**

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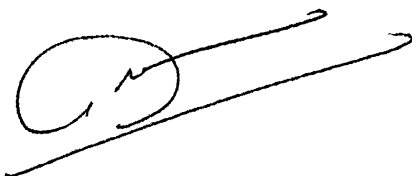
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THE SAFFRON ARMY, VIOLENCE, TERROR(ISM):  
BUDDHISM, IDENTITY, AND DIFFERENCE IN SRI LANKA\*

ANANDA ABEYSEKARA

*Summary*

This paper proposes alternative approaches to conceptualizing the relation between religion and violence, Buddhism and terror(ism). An important body of scholarship seeks to theorize religion and violence as transparent objects of disciplinary knowledge in terms of their supposed difference or interrelation, while chronically failing to appreciate them as discursive categories. The relation between religion and violence, the paper contends, is not available for disciplinary canonization as it is conventionally conceived in the now familiar terms of “Buddhism Betrayed?,” “religious violence,” “religious terrorism,” etc. Rather the questions, terms, and parameters defining which persons, practices, and knowledges can and cannot count as religion or violence, civilization or terror are produced, battled out, and subverted in minute contingent conjunctures. Put differently, they are authorized to come into (central) view and fade from view, to emerge and submerge, to become centered and decentered within a microspace of competing authoritative “native” debates and discourses.

Today “violence” — like “religion,” “ritual,” “culture,” and “nationalism” — has become another canonical category that scholars use to produce authoritative knowledges about the universe of South Asia.<sup>1</sup>

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\* I would like to thank George Bond, Robert Launay, David Scott, Pradeep Jaganathan, Gunjan Bakshi Pant, Joseph Walser, C.R. De Silva, Einar Thomassen, editor of the journal, and one anonymous reviewer for their critical comments on this paper. Research for the paper was carried out in Sri Lanka between 1994 and 1998 and it was supported by Northwestern University and the Rocky Foundation. Parts of this paper were presented at the 28th Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison, Wisconsin in October 1999, and at the Department of Anthropology, the University of Minnesota in April 2000.

<sup>1</sup>For an excellent study that shows, among other things, how “violence” in Sri Lanka achieved a “canonical status” as a problem needing anthropological explanations, see Pradeep Jaganathan, *After a Riot*. See also his “‘Violence’ as an

For example, in a major work that tries to explain the “culture of nationalism” (“violence”) in Sri Lanka, a work that provoked strong criticism, anthropologist Bruce Kapferer ventured a thesis that there exists an ontological relation between Sinhalese “violence” and Sinhalese “demonic” practices of sorcery. As he says, “there is a relation between the passion of sorcery and the furious passion of ethnic violence.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, from Kapferer’s perspective, to understand violence in Sri Lanka is to know a specific quality (“the culture of nationalism”) of the Sinhalese Buddhists.<sup>3</sup> Such is the importance of the category of violence to the continuing disciplinary studies of the Sri Lankan Buddhist universe.<sup>4</sup>

Like Kapferer’s, many scholarly writings that discuss the relation between “violence” and “Buddhism” in Sri Lanka are dominated by a particular assumption, namely that violence is the antithesis of a supposedly *authentic* Buddhism that specifically teaches nonviolence. Hence for some leading anthropologists, and other scholars of Bud-

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Analytical Problem.” I owe my critical thinking on the category of “violence” to Jeganathan’s ground-breaking work.

<sup>2</sup> See Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State*, p. 32. For Kapferer, Sinhalese Buddhist culture is characterized by a “cosmic logic,” “a logic within which the modern Sri Lankan state and a personal identity within the state can take form”(p. 78).

<sup>3</sup> For a brilliant criticism of Kapferer’s attempt at explaining the supposed culture of violence in terms of an ontology, see David Scott, “The Demonology of Nationalism.” For further incisive comments on the category of violence, see also David Scott, “‘Culture of Violence’ Fallacy.” Disciplinary theories about the “cultures of violence” are unceasing. See, for example, Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 10-13.

<sup>4</sup> For other examples of scholarly texts that attempt to construct violence, nationalism, and ethnic conflict as objects of disciplinary knowledge from a variety of perspectives, see Jonathan Spencer, ed., *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict*; Jonathan Spencer, “Writing Within”; Michael Roberts, *Exploring Confrontation*; Ananda Wickremaratne, *The Roots of Nationalism*; K.N.O. Dharmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness*.

dhism, violence is a “dark underside”<sup>5</sup> of Buddhism, and the very relation between the two represents “ethical dilemmas” for Buddhists.<sup>6</sup> Or, as Kapferer puts it, violence stands for the “nonreason” (which is associated with the “demonic” practice of sorcery) as opposed to “the reason, the teaching and way of the Buddha.”<sup>7</sup>

This supposed contradiction of violence to Buddhism led Stanley Tambiah, followed by several others, to pose a question that decisively (and more explicitly) intervenes in rethinking the relation between Buddhism and violence. Pointing particularly to the “participation” (Tambiah’s word) of monks in recent events of “violence,” Tambiah asks if Buddhism is “betrayed” by those “who are ideally dedicated to nonviolence and required by disciplinary rules to abstain from killing and to be nowhere near the marching armies and traffic in arms.”<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>5</sup> Obeyesekere argues that it is not Buddhism but Buddhist history that justifies violence. It is this Buddhist history that he calls a “dark underside.” See Obeyesekere, “Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity,” pp. 233-234, 254. For a critical reflection on Obeyesekere’s paper, see Jeganathan, “In the Shadow of Violence.” For Obeyesekere’s other concerns with violence as something opposed to the Buddhist doctrine of “nonviolence,” see his “Origins and Institutionalization of Political Violence.” For scholarly preoccupations with trying to make sense of how Buddhists “legitimate their ethical stance” on violence and war in Sri Lanka, see Tessa Bartholomeusz, “In Defense of Dharma.” A similar concern is found in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 112-116, 242.

<sup>6</sup> Sarath Amunugama, “Buddhaputra or Bhumiputra?” For similar concerns with the “... unsettling images... of monks swept up in the mobs of anti-government Sinhalese rebels, see Mark Juergensmeyer, “What the Bhikkhu Said,” pp. 53, 68.

<sup>7</sup> Thus violence as a “dark underside” of Buddhism is implied. See *Legends of People*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?* pp. 95-96. Others advance similar arguments. See Bruce Kapferer, “Remythologizing Discourses,” p. 175; John Holt, *The Religious World of Kīrti Śrī Rajasimha*, pp. 99, 133, n.3. Holt’s essentialist claim that “Most truly religious Buddhists are peace-loving people, as are most truly religious Hindus and Christians” is part of the continuing disciplinary normalization, and indeed moralization, of the relation between religion and violence (*ibid.*, p. 108). Likewise British anthropologist Jonathan Spencer who has produced a considerable body of literature on violence and nationalism in Sri Lanka, writes: “I found myself desperately trying to make sense of that familiar paradox — the perpetration of

is not hard to see that the very question of *Buddhism betrayed?* presupposes an *authentic, nonviolent* Buddhism as opposed to a “political Buddhism” (Tambiah’s term) that advocates violence. Based on such an assumption Tambiah goes on to state that “the increasing participation of monks, specially young monks... in violence, whether directly or indirectly, is a disturbing experience.”<sup>9</sup> Note that Tambiah’s essentialist understanding of the relation between monks and violence is made possible by, among other things, (some) monks’ participation in the proscribed JVP (People’s Liberation Front) movement, a practice that, as we will see later, became possible and centrally visible in the late 1980s. For Tambiah, this participation constitutes violence because the JVP stands for “militant politics” that the “central normative [Buddhist monastic] rules” forbid.<sup>10</sup>

My complaint is that this argument takes both categories of “violence” and “Buddhism” to be self-evident. That is to say, it assumes that what gets defined as “Buddhism” and “violence” in differing conditions always remains the same. In this paper I argue against these assumptions by critically rethinking the formations and deformations of the relations between Buddhism and violence, not within a macro space of one or two centuries, but in minute contingent conjunctures. By contingent conjunctures, I mean a short period of a few years — in this case between the early 1980s and the 1990s — in which various debates and discourses conjoin to foreground authoritative definitions of what can and cannot count as Buddhism or violence.<sup>11</sup> The

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evil by apparently nice, decent people.” See his “Popular Perceptions of Violence: A Provincial View,” in *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis*, p. 187; quoted in Jeganathan, “In the Shadow of Violence,” p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?* p. 100. It must be noted here that for Tambiah the late 1940s and the early 1950s represent the “political activism” of monks while the 1980s represent the “militant politics” of young monks. For other aspects of his understanding of violence as “dehumanization,” “nonhuman,” “demonization,” see Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, pp. 284–286.

<sup>10</sup> Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> I have theorized this concept in my “Colors of the Robe: Buddhism, Identity, and Difference in Sri Lanka” (book manuscript under review).

exploration of such conjunctures, I submit, is crucial to understanding religion, identity, violence, etc. as “historical” concepts whose meanings shift, that is, the ways in which specific persons and practices are authorized, enabled, and indeed obliged to come into (central) view and fade from view, to appear and disappear, to become centered and decentered as Buddhism and nonBuddhism, religion and violence, civilization and terror, identity and difference in fleeting domains of opposing debates.

To do so I will show some of the ways in which since the early 1980s a variety of Buddhist discourses began to authorize a particular Buddhist image of the “fearless” young monk who would march to the “battlefront” and lay down his life to rescue and lead the Buddhist nation facing the threat of “terrorism.” What made possible and centrally visible such authoritative discourses was the space of a few years in which some prominent members of the *sangha* and lay Buddhists began to vociferously contest the “Buddhist” identity of the UNP (United National Party) (Jayewardene) government and its mandate to rule the Buddhist country and the nation “safeguarded by monks for centuries.” In the mid- and the late 1980s, the JVP strategically drew upon these “Buddhist” discourses and appealed to young monks to join forces with its movement. To join the JVP was to support an urgent, “sacred” Buddhist task because the JVP claimed to liberate the Sinhala Buddhist (monks’) country and nation. In such a context the discourse, “country or death,” became an authorized “Buddhist” practice for the JVP monks seen as the true patriots of the country. Yet, this patriotic image of the fearless monkhood came to be contested and invested with a different kind of meaning as the Premadasa government crushed the JVP, portraying it as a “criminal,” “unBuddhist” movement threatening the “great Buddhist civilization” of Sri Lanka. To depict the JVP as an unBuddhist movement was to depict the monks of the JVP as criminal and unBuddhist. The government of Premadasa tortured these JVP monks and made them “Buddhist monks” again.

In light of this ethnographic terrain, I argue that conceptualizations of violence as a contradiction to Buddhism do not help us understand

how certain ideas and practices that became centrally visible as “Buddhism” yesterday came to count as “violence” today. The notion of the contradiction of violence to Buddhist identity presupposes a nonviolent, humanistic concept of Buddhism. As anthropologist Jeganathan has convincingly argued, “humanism” cannot be the “residual, default category that is somehow politically known or safe. Humanism, as it is invoked, carries with it a complex, contextually located politics that cannot be known or assumed a priori.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, to suppose that violence represents the opposite of humanism (i.e. Buddhism) is to take the category of violence itself at face value. My account will avoid the trap of essentialism by demonstrating that what does and does not count as religion or violence are authorized within varying bounds of competing discourses and debates.

In problematizing the dominant disciplinary narratives about violence as the “dark underside” of religion, I do not, however, seek to advance the influential Girardian argument that “violence and the sacred are inseparable.”<sup>13</sup> Nor am I interested in claiming, as does van der Veer, following Marcel Mauss, that violence is a “total social phe-

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<sup>12</sup> Jeganathan, *After a Riot*, p. 223-224. Part of Jeganathan’s telling argument is that after the famous July 1983 riots scholarly texts that sought to constitute violence as an anthropological object of knowledge employed “horror” as an abstract category to describe that event. “Horror,” he argues, is “the initial name given to the political incomprehensibility of ‘1983.’ This name is then transformed into an analytic, which is called violence.” It is through this constitution that the equation “violence  $\Rightarrow$  horror” becomes possible for anthropology (p. 6). But the equation does not end here. As Jeganathan goes on to state, if horror is another name for the “destruction of the human, which cannot be apprehended politically” and violence its analytic, to return to horror by way of violence will also return to the problem of the human.” The equation then becomes: Horror  $\Rightarrow$  violence  $\Rightarrow$  horror  $\Rightarrow$  humanism. For Jeganathan, the anthropological constitution of violence as a category rests on these “twin legs of horror and humanism”(pp. 221-223). One of the first scholars who tried to explain violence in terms of horror is S.J. Tambiah, “Horror Story.”

<sup>13</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 19. A few pages below, Girard writes, “Religion, in its broadest sense, then, must be another term for that obscurity that surrounds man’s efforts to defend himself by curative or preventative means against his own violence” (ibid., p. 23).

nomenon,” embodying “those phenomena at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological, and so on.”<sup>14</sup> Put alternatively, what preoccupies me are not questions about “religious violence” or “religious terrorism” that have now become key hermeneutical concepts in scholarly texts seeking to make available the supposed interrelation between religion violence as objects of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> Such concepts are grounded in assumptions about whether religion can or cannot be *justifiably* violent.<sup>16</sup> They fail to understand, in my view, that different

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<sup>14</sup> Peter van der Veer, “Writing Violence,” pp. 268-269.

<sup>15</sup> See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, particularly pp. 4-10; Brian K. Smith, “Monotheism and Its Discontents.” Smith writes that “Religious violence, in all of its many forms, must be accounted for *as religious* and not merely wished away as external to some self-proclaimed ideal form of the true nature of religion” (p. 404). Smith’s is a review essay of Regina Schwartz’s *The Curse of Cain*. For Schwartz, “. . . [all religious] acts of identity formation [particularly linked to biblical monotheism] are themselves acts of violence” (ibid., p. 5). I am also skeptical of the theoretical soundness of the now popular concept of “religious nationalism.” Talal Asad has cogently argued against such a notion. He writes that “To insist that nationalism should be seen as a religion, or even as having been shaped by religion is, in my view, to miss the nature and consequence of the revolution brought about by the Enlightenment doctrine of secularism in the structure of modern collective representations and practices. Of course modern nationalism draws on preexisting languages and practices — including those that we call, anachronistically, ‘religious.’ How could it be otherwise? Yet it does not follow that religion forms nationalism.” (Asad, “Religion, Nation-State, Secularism,” p. 187.)

<sup>16</sup> Questions about the *religious* “justification for violence” govern Juergensmeyer’s entire book. For example, he writes: “This is one of history’s ironies, that although religion has been used to justify violence, violence can also empower religion.” *Terror in the Mind of God*, p. 242. In a set of highly flawed arguments, without any critical awareness of the problematic of Western (colonial and orientalist) constructions of categories like “religion,” Juergensmeyer suggests that one “scenario for peace” is “separating religion from politics,” which he claims is to be found in “the noble rhetoric of . . . Enlightenment thinkers . . .” (ibid., pp. 235-239). For other concerns with conceptualizing the relation between religion and violence in terms of justification, see also Sudhir Kakar, *The Colors of Violence*, pp. 192-194. He contends that “. . . religious justification of a conflict involves fundamental values and releases some of our most violent passions. . . every religion has a vision of divinely legitimized violence. . .” (ibid., p. 193).

conjunctures render the terms and parameters of what persons, practices, knowledges, and so on can count as religion or violence contingent and hence unavailable for disciplinary canonization as transparent objects of knowledge.

*The Making of a “Fearless” Monk*

In the early 1980s numerous Sri Lankan newspapers carried headline statements by Buddhist monks defining the role of a monk in Sri Lankan society in a particular way. Among them stands out the prominent monk, Maduluwawe Sobhita, the incumbent of Nagavihara temple in Kotte. A popular preacher and strong supporter of the former SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) — his picture appeared on the front page of Tambiah’s *Buddhism Betrayed?* — Sobhita became a formidable critic of the Jayewardene government. In March 1983, addressing the twelfth anniversary of the *sangha* council held at Visuddharamaya temple in Colombo, Sobhita stated: “We can not do anything except through politics.” He elaborated:

Some say that monks do not need politics; but we cannot do anything except through politics. Even if we do not endorse party politics, we have to take certain decisions in important situations. We should have the right to comment on good and bad things that the government does. . . . [I]f a government engages in things that are against the religion [Buddhism] and the nation (*jātika virōdhi āgam virōdhi*) it becomes necessary for Buddhist monks to appoint a new government.<sup>17</sup>

Again in 1983, speaking at a Buddhist monk’s funeral, Sobhita insisted that “monks cannot be separated from common public problems” and stated that providing people with the knowledge about solutions to life’s problems is a “duty” (*yutukamak*) of the monk.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, he pointed out that in order to fulfill this duty, the monk must reverse his role. On a different occasion, Sobhita quite ironically stated

<sup>17</sup> “Dēshapālanayen Torava Apata Kala Hāki Deyak Nā” (“There is Nothing We can Do Apart from Politics”), *Divayina*, March 10, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> “Podu Janatā Prashanavalin Bhikshūn Āt Karannna Bā” (“Monks Cannot be Separated From Common Public Problems”), *Dinakara*, Feb. 1, 1983.

that “there is no point in preaching sermons when people are suffering”<sup>19</sup> and the country was reaching an abyss of decadence, corruption, bribery, and injustice. In such a society, he claimed, “Buddhism cannot be followed.”<sup>20</sup>

Sobhita argued that today lay Buddhists assume that Buddhist monks live in luxury and do nothing but sleep. In fact, “after visiting a temple, most people immediately ask, ‘Is the monk sleeping?’ [This deception] is a product of the open market economy.”<sup>21</sup> Sobhita emphasized elsewhere that “monks are not a race that sleeps” and said that “if they had done so the religion and the nation (*jātiya āgama*) would not exist today.”<sup>22</sup> Well-known Buddhist newspapers like *Budusarana* readily endorsed Sobhita’s views:

...we must accept that there would be no Buddha Sāsana, the Sinhaleseness (*sinhalatvaya*) and ancient temples and pagodas if the venerable Maha Sangha had been sleeping. Our venerable monks have achieved such an elevated status (*shrēṣṭa tatvayata patva āta*). Yet some [people] have not realized the monks’ importance. The monks are a noble group that never ‘sleeps through’ the issues of the nation, religion, and language. Monks are the custodians of the nation. . . . They must be given the highest respect.<sup>23</sup>

This rhetoric in the early 1980s about the recognition of the role and the place of the monks who safeguarded the religious and national values of the country, now threatened by the vices of the open market economy, was a debate with the government of President Jayewardene. The debate, which continued well into the late 1980s, must be located in the context in which President Jayewardene came to portray a particular “Buddhist” image of himself and his administration.

<sup>19</sup> “Janatāva Asahanayen Inna Yugayaka Bana Dēshanā Kirīmen Vādak Nā” (“There is no Point in Preaching Bana when People are Unhappy”), *Divayina*, January 4, 1984.

<sup>20</sup> *Divayina*, January 4, 1984.

<sup>21</sup> *Divayina*, January 4, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> “Hamuduruvaru Nidāganna Jātiyak Novē” (“Monks are not a Race that Sleeps”), Editorial, *Budusarana*, Nov. 22, 1984.

<sup>23</sup> “Hāmaduruvaru Sātapīma” (“Monks’ Sleeping”), *Budusarana*, Nov. 30, 1984.

An important part of the Jayewardene government's political discourse was the establishment of a *dharmista* ("righteous") society. In such a society, Jayewardene argued, people would lead, free (*nivāha*), moral lives according to the "pristine" (*nirmala*) words of the Buddha. Jayewardene presented himself as an example of the ideal Buddhist. In 1981, as the chief guest speaker at a Buddhist temple, Jayewardene said that "people know my strong devotion (*vishāla bhaktiya*) and my strong acceptance (*vishāla piligānīma*) with regard to Buddhism." Jayewardene pointed out that he "undertook the office of presidency and would leave it without any craving" because he followed the "pristine" words of the Buddha. He exhorted others to emulate his example and said, "That is how we should all live."<sup>24</sup> For Jayewardene, contrary to many of his monk-critics, this pristine Buddhism was not confined to any particular nationality but transcended all ethnic boundaries. Once he stated that "in keeping with [Buddhist] principles" he did not "differentiate between people saying that this is a Sinhalese, this is a Tamil."<sup>25</sup> (Jayewardene also claimed that Buddhaghosa, one of the best known Buddhist commentators, who lived and worked at the historic Mahavihara temple in early fifth century CE Sri Lanka, was a Tamil.<sup>26</sup>) Equally significant, Jayewardene insisted that in a *dharmista* society in which this multiethnic, pristine Buddhism exists, monks remove themselves from "politics" and lead "pure" exemplary monastic lives. Jayewardene supporters hailed him as the "best national symbol that Sri Lanka could present to the world" because "he practices Buddhism to the letter" (*akuratama pilipadinavā*).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Speech delivered by President Jayewardene at Sirimalwatte Temple in Ganegoda, Mihirigama, May 16, 1981.

<sup>25</sup> Speech delivered by President Jayewardene at Hindu College in Ratmalana, April 1979; quoted in "Hātta Hatveni Vasarata Pā Thabana Baudha Nāyaka Janapati" ("The Buddhist Leader/President who Turns Seventy Seven"), *Budusarana*, Oct. 16, 1982.

<sup>26</sup> "Bududahama Anuva Gāṭalu Visadamu" ("Let's Solve the Problems According to Buddhism"), speech delivered by Jayewardene at Hambuluwa Rajama Temple, published newspaper article, no name and date.

<sup>27</sup> *Budusarana*, Oct. 16, 1982.

This “Buddhist” image of the Jayewardene government, with its rhetoric of an “apolitical” monkhood practicing pristine Buddhism, became the subject of fierce criticism from both monks and lay Buddhists, a criticism that came into central view in the early 1980s. It is in the context of such a debate that we must locate the emerging monastic demands for the recognition of the role and place of the monk in society.

One of the vocal critics of the Jayewardene regime was Ediriweera Sarachchandra, a well-known lay Buddhist intellectual and playwright in Sri Lanka. In early 1982, Sarachchandra published a book titled *Dharmista Samājaya* (Righteous Society). He argued that in the name of “development” (*samvardhanaya*), far from creating a righteous society, the open-market, capitalistic policies of the Jayewardene government introduced various vices — from tourism to immigration of Buddhist women as domestic servants to the Middle East — that brought about a complete moral downfall of society. In short, Sarachchandra’s books is a story about a society in which inequality, craving, selfishness, and indignity abound, and the rich and the powerful dominate the poor and the weak. In such a society the difference between the human and the beast disappeared, and “the law of the jungle” reigns supreme.<sup>28</sup> Other criticisms of the Jayewardene administration followed. In 1982 Buddhist monk Labuduwe Siridhamma, a staunch supporter of the SLFP, called Jayewardene a “traitor,” a term that formed an important part of the JVP’s anti-UNP government rhetoric (more below). Siridhamma, like Sobhita and Sarachchandra, accused Jayewardene of creating an “unrighteous society”<sup>29</sup> and demanded

<sup>28</sup> Ediriweera Sarachchandra, *Dharmista Samājaya*, pp. 144–145. His criticisms of the state provoked opposition. It is alleged that in 1982, at a Sinhala Bala Mandalaya meeting held in Colombo to discuss the theme of the (Jayewardene government’s) “Destruction of the Sinhala Civilization,” a mob of UNP supporters attacked Sobhita and Sarachchandra with bicycle chains and chairs. See “Adō Saracchandra Tōda Jātiya Bēraganna Avē Kiyālā Pahara Dunnā” (“They Beat us saying, ‘Yo, Sarachchandra, Did you come to Save the Nation?’”), *Divayina*, June 84, 1984.

<sup>29</sup> “Ada Sri Lankādvīpaya Adharmatdvīpayak” (“Today the Island of Sri Lanka is an Island of Unrighteousness”), *Ātta*, Sept. 2, 1982. See also *Dinakara*, May 22, 1984;

that Jayewardene be removed from office.<sup>30</sup> In fact Siridhamma was one of the first monks in the 1980s to call on monks to “march forward and protect the country and the nation” from the government. Such monks who opposed Jayewardene became “heroes.” After his death in 1985, Siridhamma came to be portrayed as a “heroic” and “brave”<sup>31</sup> (*nirbhīta*) monk, a “fearless lion” (*kēsara sinhayek*).<sup>32</sup> Some argued that Siridhamma should be held as an “example to the Buddhist monk” (*bhikkhuvata ādarshayak*) living in a country “ruled by “beastly” (*mruga*) and “unfortunate” (*mūsala*) policies of the Jayewardene’s government.”<sup>33</sup>

Such discourses about the monk as a brave, fearless lion who must protect the nation threatened by a beastly government gained momentum. In 1985 Maduluwawe Sobhita argued that “it was the primary duty of the *sangha* to come forward bravely against injustice.”<sup>34</sup> Sobhita demanded that monks stop “eating and sleeping” and “march forward”:

Since the introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, the Bhikkhus have played an important role in the government by fulfilling the duty of advising the king. Monks became important advisers to. . . [various kings]. On occasion, some kings lived on the food collected by monks on their alms round. Therefore, when the Sinhala race is facing a decisive situation, monks must march forward (*peramuna gata yutuyi*). It does not befit a monk to continue the daily schedule of eating and sleeping. [We must remember that] in the wake of foreign threats to the country, monks such as Variyapola, Kudapola and Miggettuwatta acted fearlessly. Some of these monks happily confronted the bullet!<sup>35</sup>

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“Dharmista Samājaya Kō?” (“Where is the Righteous Society?”), *Dinakara*, June 27, 1985.

<sup>30</sup> *Ātta*, January 31, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> *Dinakara*, Sept. 18, 1985.

<sup>32</sup> *Divayina*, June 1, 1985.

<sup>33</sup> *Dinakara*, May 31, 1985. See also “Oba Apagen Samugatte Ratata Oba Vānna Dahas Gananak Avashyava Āti Yugayakayi” (“You Passed Away in an Era in which the Country Needs Thousands of Monks like You”), *Divayina*, June 1, 1985.

<sup>34</sup> “Thero Deplores Bhikkhus Dabbling in Politics,” *Island*, July 3, 1985.

<sup>35</sup> “Vāladīmat Sātapi mat Pamanak Bhiskhu Jīvitayata Taram Novē” (“Only Eating and Sleeping Do not Befit a Monk”), *Divayina*, Feb. 11, 1985.

Sobhita continued to evoke this image of the monk who, like historical Sinhala heroes, is fearless and who braves death to protect the country. He linked that image to the “Sinhala race and nation” and said, “monks have no families to protect, no homes, no properties, no cattle. But they must guard with their lives (*pana men räka gata yutuyi*) the country in which the [Sinhalese Buddhist] race exists, the race that fed them for two thousand years. The monks must not bow their heads to any one.”<sup>36</sup>

Other similar, if not more provocative, discourses became visible. At a Buddhist ceremony held to transfer merit to the soldiers killed in the war, a Buddhist monk named Mahapallegama Dhammalankara clamored that “monks should march to the battle front (*satan peramunata*) without practicing the monastic image of silence” (*muni vata noräka*).<sup>37</sup> He claimed that “there is no Buddhist *sangha* where there is no Sinhalese race and there is no Sinhalese race where there is no Buddhist *sangha*,” and so he implored the “educated and virtuous (*silvat*) monks” to march forward to protect the Sinhalese race. If monks “isolate themselves (*pättakata vī sītiyot*) practicing meditation in times of national crisis,” he stressed, they would jeopardize the future of the country.<sup>38</sup>

More influential members of the *sangha* such as Walpola Rahula joined forces with these discourses. At a meeting of five hundred monks convened to protest the proposed legislation by the All-Party Conference to “solve the ethnic problem” in Sri Lanka, Rahula went so far as to say that the “Sangha is ready to lay down their lives” to prevent the government from implementing the proposals. Claiming that the proposals would lead to the division of the country, Rahula

<sup>36</sup> “Bhikhūn Vahansēlā Kisivekuta Hisa Nonamā Ratat Jātiyat Räka Gata Yutuyi” (“Without Bowing their Heads to Any One, Buddhist Monks Must Protect the Country and the Nation”), *Davasa*, July 9, 1985.

<sup>37</sup> “Maha Sagaruvana Munivata Noräka Satan Peramunata Vädiya Yutuyi” (“Monks Should March to the Battle Front Without Practicing the Monastic Image of Silence”), *Divayina*, Feb. 11, 1985.

<sup>38</sup> *Divayina*, Feb. 11, 1985.

said if “peaceful avenues” do not work, the Sangha has a “weapon.” “Using that weapon [we] will wage a battle all over the country. The police, the armed forces or any other force will not stop us.”<sup>39</sup> Rahula did not explain what the “weapon” was, but Maduluwawe Sobhita, who was present on the occasion, pointed out that if these proposals are implemented, “the Sangha will be willing to sacrifice the lives of ten theros [*sic*] for every clause [in the proposals]. We have no families nor any wealth. If one [monk] can die before you grow old, that is a comfort. We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the sake of country, race and religion. [Otherwise] future generations will ask whether we were sleeping. . . .”<sup>40</sup>

Such rhetoric continued to make headlines in the newspapers.<sup>41</sup> Among them one particular example stands out. In 1986 Bengamuwe Nalaka, the joint secretary of Mavbima Surakime Vyaparaya, MSV (The Movement for the Protection of the Motherland),<sup>42</sup> wrote an article with a famous caption in Pāli called “Mā Nivatta Abhikkama,” “do not stop; come forward.” These are words that Buddha is supposed to have uttered in encouraging his disciples to tread the path to

<sup>39</sup> “Sangha is Ready to Lay Down their Lives,” *Island*, Dec. 24, no year (1984?).

<sup>40</sup> *Divayina*, Dec. 24, no year (1984?).

<sup>41</sup> See “Maha Sagaruvanata Ārayumak: Nihadava Nosita Peramunata Vadinna” (“An Invitation to the Monks: Do not be Silent; March Forward”), *Dinarāsa*, March 13, 1986; “Rata Jātiya Rāka Gānīmata Bhikshuva Peramunata Ā Yutuyi” (“Buddhists Monks Must Come forward to Protect the Country and the Nation”), *Divayina*, 1986 (?); “Vatman Arbudaya Hā Bhikshun Vahanse” (“Contemporary Crisis and the Buddhist Monk”), *Divayina*, Sept. 19, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> As its secretary, Bengamuwe Nalaka, explains, the MSV was founded in 1986 to “generate opposition. . . to any administrative or political division of the country along communal or racial lines.” Its administrative body consisted of both monks and prominent lay members such as the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Bandaranaike. Nalaka claims that since some early monk-members of the movement such as Sobhita and Wilegoda Ariyadeva issued “misleading and harmful” statements that violated the movement’s objective, the name Vyāpārāya (movement) was changed to Sanvidhānaya (organization). See “A Reply from the Maubima Surākīme Sanvidhānaya,” *Divayina*, May 24, 1989. On the organizational structure of the MSV, see Peter Schalk, “‘Unity’ and ‘Sovereignty.’”

Nibbana, out of Samsara. But Nalaka used them to mean something somewhat different. Recalling the history of “brave” Sinhala monks who “fostered and protected the heritage of the Buddha Sāsana” by “facing the bullet and fearing no death,” he argued:

Buddhists must recall these words of the Buddha. This is exactly how the Buddha used these words addressing the monks. As those dedicated to travel the path of the Dhamma, especially monks should always recollect these words. This is no recollection of God. . . These Buddha’s words did and do bring solace to the monk who never cowardly runs away (*bayen noduvana*) and hides in the face of threats (*tādana pīdana*) and physical blows (*pahara*). We must record that today the occasion has arrived to think about this precious saying and act on it.<sup>43</sup>

It is easy to see that these dominant narratives begin to make centrally visible a particular image of the Buddhist monk — the monk who does not sleep, who abandons *bana* preaching and meditation and marches forward, who is fearless and ready to sacrifice his life to protect the Buddha Sāsana and the Sinhala nation. My argument is that this image of the monk gets construed as “Buddhist” not simply because the agents of these discourses are Buddhist monks, but that image is authorized by a context in which the very same monks contested the “Buddhist” image of the Jayewardene government.

*The Emergence of the Discourse of “Terrorism”: Contestation of “Buddhist Nonviolence”*

By the early 1980s, the force of the LTTE claim for a separate state in Northern Sri Lanka became a visible reality. On July 23, 1983, the Tamil Tigers ambushed and killed eighteen soldiers of the Sri Lankan army. A few days later, a massive riot broke out in central Colombo, a riot in which the Sinhalese attacked and killed Tamils. They looted and set fire to many Tamil businesses and properties worth billions. After the riot, the LTTE continued to massacre Sinhalese civilians in the North, and carried out periodic bomb explosions in the capital. In the wake of the LTTE demand for a separate state, a ferocious public

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<sup>43</sup> “Mā Nivatta Abhikkhama” (“Do not Stop, Come Forward”), *Divayina*, Sept. 6, 1986.

debate arose between Jayewardene and some influential Buddhist monks, focusing on questions about violence, Buddhist (monastic) identity, and the “country and nation.”

In early 1984, several Buddhist monks and monastic committees insisted that Jayewardene wage a full-scale war to eradicate the “problem of terrorism.” Identifying the Tamil Tigers as a “terrorist” group threatening the “unity of the country,” Labuduwe Siridhamma demanded that the government hold “no peace talks [with the Tamil Tigers] before [achieving] a victory by war.”<sup>44</sup> Similar monastic voices insisting on war against the Tamil Tigers flashed across the newspapers,<sup>45</sup> but one particular statement generated much controversy. In January 1984, Walpola Rahula told Jayewardene in a public meeting that the government should eradicate terrorism militarily.<sup>46</sup> Two years before Rahula worked with Jayewardene in creating the Buddhist and Pali University,<sup>47</sup> but he turned against him in this context as the president did not heed the monk’s advice to “curb terrorism” in the North.<sup>48</sup>

Jayewardene stated bluntly that he was not ready to “kill innocent people” in the name of eradicating terrorism. He stressed that he would not act like Idi Amin or Hitler or like Sinhalese King Sirisaga Bo who cut off and handed his own head to the bounty hunter. He questioned the Buddhist identity of those monks who supported war by saying that “Buddhists would never ask him to [kill and] act inhumanely” (*amānushika andamin katayutu karannāyi bauddhayō nam kavādāvat kiyannā*).<sup>49</sup> Jayewardene repeatedly expressed his opposition to “the

<sup>44</sup> “Yuddhayen Jayagannā Turu Sākaccā Pāvātvīma Natara Karanu” (“Suspend [Peace] Talks Before Victory by War”), *Divayina*, Jan. 12, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> “Curb Terrorism First, then Consider [a] Solution,” *Island*, Dec. 29, 1984.

<sup>46</sup> Cited in “Rahula Hāmuduruvō Hā Janādhipati Tumā” (“Ven. Rahula and the President”), *Ātta*, Jan. 30, 1984.

<sup>47</sup> I have detailed the discursive configurations of these monastic/state relations in an unpublished paper entitled “Formations of ‘Religion and Politics,’” in my “Colors of the Robe.”

<sup>48</sup> “Monk Blames Jayewardene,” Newspaper Clipping (no name), Jan. 29, 1984.

<sup>49</sup> “Ahinsakayan Marā Dāmā Trastavādaya Madinu Bā” (“Killing Innocent People cannot Eradicate Terrorism”), *Dinamina*, Jan. 31, 1984.

use of violence in Sri Lanka”<sup>50</sup> and challenged monks advocating a military solution to the problem of terrorism. On one occasion, speaking specifically about some monks’ picketing to “inform the president about the danger of terrorism” in the North, Jayewardene said that monks did not understand the gravity of violence because “monks are not the ones who die” in a war. Berating monks’ picketing as “false activities” (*boru vāda*), Jayewardene said that if monks “want to go to war we can send them to war.”<sup>51</sup>

As Jayewardene refused a military solution to the problem of terrorism claiming that it contravened Buddhism, loud monastic voices challenged his position. In 1985 one monk, Uduwawalle Chandananda, issued a statement that made front-page headline news. Chandananda argued that by failing to “handle terrorism” successfully the government “made it impossible for the Sinhala people to live in dignity in their own country.”<sup>52</sup> Chandanada questioned why a powerful government like the UNP could not “tackle terrorism” when kings [in the past] “consulted monks on all matters” and fought invaders to unify “the country under one flag.” He demanded that if the government could not “stop the terrorists, it hand over the country’s ruling powers to the Mahasangha.”<sup>53</sup> Monks like Walpola Rahula also spoke about

<sup>50</sup> See also *Weekend*, Jan. 8, 1984.

<sup>51</sup> “Satya Kriyā Yanu Kumakda?” (“What is the Satya Kriyā?”), speech by President Jayewardene at Sri Piyaratane Pirivena in Galle, Sept. 9, 1985; printed in *Apē Jātika Urumaya* (“Our National Heritage”): Speeches by Jayewardene, (Colombo: Rajaye Mudranalaya, 1986).

<sup>52</sup> Cited in “Lalith Counters Monk who Said, ‘Give Us the Country to Rule,’” *Daily News*, July 31, 1985.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily News*, July 31, 1985. In response to Chandananda, the then Minister of Defense, Lalit Atulatumudali, argued that contemporary problems were different from those of King Parakrama Bahu but assured that “Buddhists had nothing to fear so long as the government was in power.” Other Ministers such as U.B. Wijekoon said that the monks should not blame the government when “the Sangha had failed in taking the Dhamma to Tamil People.” *Daily News*, July 31, 1985. See also “An Amazing Proposal,” Editorial, *Daily News*, August 1, 1985.

the monk as an ideally qualified individual for the leadership of the country.<sup>54</sup>

Such narratives that envisioned monks both as political advisers and capable leaders of the country who would advocate war to defend the “dignity” of Sinhala Buddhists challenged the government’s position as a “Buddhist” regime because it did not seek a military solution to terrorism. What is implicit in the argument here is that by failing to combat terrorism by war, the government lost not only its Buddhist identity but also its mandate to rule “Sinhala Buddhist” Sri Lanka.

Later such monastic voices became more vocal about the government’s failure to destroy terrorism and its future threat to Sinhala Buddhists. Following the LTTE’s shooting and killing of Buddhist devotees worshipping at the Bo tree in Anuradhapura in the mid-1980s, a newspaper reported Sobhita’s clamoring that “the government must resign without destroying (*kābāsiniya nokara*) the country and the nation.”<sup>55</sup> Holding Jayewardene responsible for the “river of blood (*lē vilak*) that terrorists created in Anuradhapura,” Sobhita said: “If the government continues to rule Sri Lanka, the country, religion, and nation will be over (*ivarayī*). I demand (*balakaravanva*) that President J.R. Jayewardene resign, handing over the country, which Buddhists have protected for two thousand five hundred years, to a better qualified [Buddhist] person.” Sobhita went on to argue that as individuals “who are dedicated to protecting the future of the country on behalf of the younger generation,” the monks “must awaken” (*avadikaraviya yutuyi*) the na-

<sup>54</sup> “‘Nāyaktvayata Bhikshuva Taram Sudusu An Kisi Kenek Nā’ — Walpola Rahula” (“There is no Other Individual More Qualified for Leadership than a Buddhist Monk”), *Divayina*, March 19, 1985. See also “Sagaruvanē Anusāsanā Notakā Kriyākalot Anāgataya Andurē — Bellanwila Wimalaratana” (“If Buddhist Monks’ Advice is Ignored, the Future [of the Country] will be in the Dark”), *Davasa*, August 19, 1986.

<sup>55</sup> “Ratat Jātiyat Kābāsiniya Nokara Ānduva Illā Asviya Yutuyi” (“The Government Must Resign without Destroying the Country and the Nation”), *Dinarāsa*, May 15, 1986.

tion.<sup>56</sup> Stating that the ruler of the country should be “righteous” and “virtuous” (*silvat*), well-known monk Hadigalle Paññatissa, who, like Rahula, was an early Jayewardene ally, warned that if monks did not oppose the [unrighteous] leadership of Jayewardene, the future generations will see them as “traitors.”<sup>57</sup> (These concerns about the threat of “terrorism” to Buddhism in general and to monks in particular were rendered more visible in mid-1987, after the LTTE decapitated thirty-two monks on Buddhist pilgrimage in Arantalawa, Ampara.<sup>58</sup>)

These discourses depict the Jayewardene government as unrighteous and as having lost its right to rule the country because it failed to listen to the *sangha* and “curb terrorism.” In other words, for Jayewardene to be “righteous” and “virtuous” — that is, to be *truly Sinhala Buddhist* at this particular time — he should protect the Buddha Sāsana even at the cost of human lives. This questioning of Jayewardene’s inability to deal with the problem of terrorism became prominent within the UNP party itself. In late 1987, Gamini Jayasuriya, the then Minister of Agriculture, the secretary of the Mahabodhi Society in Sri Lanka, and a reputable Buddhist, resigned from the cabinet when the government proposed a bill to give greater autonomy to Tamils in the North. Jayasuriya, whom some prominent members of the *sangha* later honored as a man “born to save the country and Buddhism” because he resigned from his ministerial post, claimed that the bill would destroy the unity of Buddhist Lanka.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Dinarāsa*, May 15, 1986. Such demands for Jayewardene’s resignation became unceasing. See “Bāri Magula Damā Gedara Palayan: Ānduvata Erehiva Mahajana Hada Nāgeyi” (“Go Home if you Cannot Do the Job: The Public Voice Rises Against the Government”), *Dinarāsa*, June 2, 1986.

<sup>57</sup> See “Budu Sasunata Kala Nigāvak” (“A Dishonor to the Buddha Sāsana”), *Divayina*, June 16, 1987; “Himivaru Gātanaya Kalat Budu Sasuna Nasanna Bā” (“Even if Monks are Killed, the Buddha Sāsana Cannot be Destroyed”), *Divayina*, August 3, 1987.

<sup>58</sup> *Divayina*, August 3, 1987. Arantalawa incident did not take place in 1986 as Tambiah thinks. See *Buddhism Betrayed?* p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Nanda and Abeysinha, eds., *Gāmini Jayasuriya Abhinanda*. See also *Sunday Times*, May 10, 1998, SLnet. In recognition of Jayasuriya’s “eternal” service

Questioning the Jayewardene government's Buddhist identity also inevitably involved questioning the identity of Jayewardene ally-monks. On President Jayewardene's 80th birthday in September 1986, for example, the government newspapers published statements by several chief monks — Talalle Dhammananda, Pahamune Gunananda, Dompe Dammaratana, et al. — praising Jayewardene's leadership.<sup>60</sup> Days later one newspaper editorial berated above monks' support for Jayewardene as "utterly shameless behavior" and questioned bluntly, "Are these monks?"<sup>61</sup> On some occasions such chief monks who expressed support for the government were physically assaulted in public places by young Buddhist monks themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Such acts of opposition must be seen in a context in which chief monks who expressed support for the government came to be branded by the JVP as "traitors to the country" (*dēshadrōhi*) while monks — mostly young monks — who opposed the government (*rājatdrōhi*) came to be praised as "patriotic" (*dēshaprēmī*).<sup>63</sup> This is because the Jayewardene government was deemed the biggest "traitor" to the country. In fact the discourses that continued to appear in the mid- and late 1980s, calling on monks to "get off the old couch,"<sup>64</sup> and

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to Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the Malwatta and Asgiriya monastic chapters conferred on him two honorary Buddhist titles called "Śrī Lankābhīmāni" and "Sāsana Bandhu Janaranjana Kīrti Śrī Dhara." See *Gāmini Jayasuriya Abhinanda*.

<sup>60</sup> See *Dinamina*, Sept. 24, 25, 29, 1986.

<sup>61</sup> "Mahā Sangha Ratnayada Mē?" ("Is this the Mahā Sangha?"), *Ātta*, Sept. 30, 1986.

<sup>62</sup> I have detailed accounts of a popular incident in which a group of supposed JVP monks attacked and threatened the life of a staunch UPN supporter, Akuretiye Amarawamsa, the principal of the Vidyodaya Pirivena at Yakkaduwe Paññarama's funeral in 1985. The monks demanded that Amarawamsa not mention in his speech the name of President Jayewardene, the chief guest at the funeral. Interview with Kakkapalliye Anuruddha at Vidyalankara Pirivena, Nov. 1997.

<sup>63</sup> This is precisely why Nalaka says he founded in 1984 the Deshapremi Bhikkhu Peramuna (The Patriotic Bhikkhu Front). Interview with Bengamuwe Nalaka, Oct. 1997.

<sup>64</sup> "Parana Kavicciyen Bimata Bahimu Api" ("Let us Get off the Old Couch"), *Divayina*, June 14, 1987.

“get down from the balcony [of the mansion]”<sup>65</sup> and save the country and the nation, targeted a specific audience of monks.<sup>66</sup> Many such discourses depicted young monks (*taruna himivaru*) as “unselfish” (*parahitakāmi*)<sup>67</sup> and “patriotic”<sup>68</sup> heroes who should be guided not to be the “tools” (*atakolu*) of the government<sup>69</sup> while portraying the chief monks (*nāyaka hāmuduruwaru*) as those who dishonor the *sangha* by supporting the government.<sup>70</sup> During this time some monks wrote that “the Buddha Sāsana and monks are helpless like a ship without a captain,”<sup>71</sup> but other monks expressed confidence that young monks would protect the Buddha Sāsana. In the late 1980s, at the Sri Lanka National Sangha Council held at the Mahabodhi Society in Maradana, Maduluwawe Sobhita said, “Young monks should be safeguarded. If young monks are molded correctly, the whole Buddha Sāsana will be protected.”<sup>72</sup> Another monk, Bellanwila Wimalaratana argued that the “power” of young monks (*balavēgaya*) and the leadership that they give when the country is facing a national problem are noble (*vishistayi*). Several other influential monks gathered at the council — Walimitiyawe Kusaladhamma, Muruttetuwe Ananda, Kamburupitiye, and Vanaratana — stated that “young monks should act with foresight” when the government “denigrates” and “suppresses” (*avamānaya*

<sup>65</sup> “Samiduni Sadāllen Bāsa Midulata Vadinna” (“Venerable Monk! Get Down from the Balcony and March to the Field”), *Divayina*, Feb. 22, 1987.

<sup>66</sup> “Nāyakatvayata Bhikshuva Taram Sudusu An Kenek Nā.”

<sup>67</sup> “Parahitakāmi Taruna Himivaru” (“Unselfish Young Monks”), *Dinamina*, Oct. 1, 1987.

<sup>68</sup> “Vatman Taruna Bhikshuva Samājayata Vāda Dayaka Viya Yutuyi” (“The Contemporary Young Buddhist Monk Must Serve Society”), *Divayina*, Dec. 29, 1986.

<sup>69</sup> “Parana Kavicciyen Bimata Bahimu Api.”

<sup>70</sup> See “Mahanāhimivarunta Sinhala Akāpada?” (“Are the Chief Monks Against the Sinhala?”) *Divayina*, Oct. 29, 1986; “Mahasagaruvanata Nāhima Saranaya” (“May the Chief Monks Bless the Mahā Sangha”), *Dinarāsa*, Sept. 11, 1987.

<sup>71</sup> “Parana Kavicciyen Bimata Bahimu Api.”

<sup>72</sup> “Sagaruvanata Abhibavā Yāmata Kisivekuta Ida Tabannē Nā” (“We Will not Allow Anyone to Supersede Monks”), *Davasa*, no date (late 1980s).

*hā mardanayata*) monks. “The young monks can create a righteous society within a united Sri Lanka. The time has come to take action.”<sup>73</sup>

This portrayal of young monks as the future engineers of a righteous society in an “unrighteous” country suppressing the *sangha* preceded an important event: the signing of Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord on July 28, 1987. When President Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the accord to bring Indian troops to help Sri Lanka disarm the LTTE, thousands of young monks, headed by monks such as Maduluwawe Sobhita and Muruttetuwe Ananda, took to the streets and joined many Sinhalese people rioting against the accord.<sup>74</sup> Later, the police took hundreds of monks into custody, charging them with the violation of law and order in the country. A few weeks after the arrest of the monks, the government announced its plan to issue special identity cards to all Sri Lankan monks because of its concern about the “unattractive” (*aprasanna*) behavior of monks during the signing of the accord.<sup>75</sup> The government went so far as to suggest that many monks who took part in the riots were not “real monks” but “rebels disguised as monks” (*bhikshu ves gena*). It even warned the public against such robed “men,” claiming that recently the sale of saffron robes had increased in the city.<sup>76</sup>

Many monks and lay Buddhists challenged the government’s charges against the monks and questioned the government’s own Buddhist image. Newspapers carried reports of how “Jayewardene’s righteous government” locked up the “monks who are engaged in a noble task of claiming the rights of people.”<sup>77</sup> Influential monks like Palipana Chan-

<sup>73</sup> *Davasa*, no date (late 1980s).

<sup>74</sup> “Bhikkus Protest,” *Daily News*, July 28, 1987.

<sup>75</sup> “Bhikshūn Vahansēta Jātika Hādunum Patak” (“A National Identity Card for the Buddhist Monk”), Editorial, *Dinamina*, Sept. 1, 1987.

<sup>76</sup> “Kaha Sivuru Vikinīma Vādivē” (“The Sale of Yellow Robes Increases”), *Divayina*, August 10, 1987.

<sup>77</sup> “Dharmista Jayewardene Rajaya Bhikshūn Tunsiyak At Adanguvata Aran” (“Jayewardene Righteous Government has Taken Three Hundred Monks into Custody”), *Ātta*, Sept. 5, 1987.

dananda demanded the immediate release of monks from prisons.<sup>78</sup> Later other monks such as Sobhita, who too was arrested for inciting monks, clamored at rallies that all Sri Lankan Buddhists “should be grateful (*nayagāti*) to young monks who ate prison food to solve a national problem.”<sup>79</sup>

Some monks also decried the government plan to issue identity cards to Buddhist monks by asking if the government was demanding that people worship monks after inspecting identity cards.<sup>80</sup> Others claimed that monks do not need special forms of identification because they already carry national identity cards as citizens of Sri Lanka.<sup>81</sup> Though the plan to issue *bhikkhu* identity cards never went into effect, many voices charged that the state was trying to destroy young monks and urged them to “rally and defeat the suppression of monks.”<sup>82</sup>

This image of young monks subjected to suppression became more public after President Jayewardene personally ordered the suspension of state grants to many monastic educational *pirivenas* whose students the government claimed were “engaging in harmful activities that obstruct peace” in Sri Lanka.<sup>83</sup> One newspaper editorial characterized the Jayewardene decision as an attack not only on the *sangha* but on Buddhism itself and claimed that it violated the constitution that promises

<sup>78</sup> “Cōdanā Nāti Himivārun Vahāma Nidahas Karanna” (“Release Innocent Monks Immediately”), *Divayina*, Sept. 1, 1987.

<sup>79</sup> “Sangha Ruvanata Abhibavā Yāmata Kisivekuta Ida Tabannē Nā.”

<sup>80</sup> “Hādunum Pata Balā Namaskāra Kirīma?” (“Paying Respect After Inspecting the Identity Card?”), *Davasa*, Sept. 4, 1987.

<sup>81</sup> See “Bhikshūnta Hādunum Pata Avashya Nā” (“Monks Do not Need Identity Cards”), *Dinamina*, Oct. 14; “Bhikshūnta Hādunum Pata Nisā Matuvana Prashna” (“The Questions that Monks Face because of the Identity Cards for Monks”), *Davasa*, Oct 15, 1987.

<sup>82</sup> “Bhikshu Mardanayata Ida Denna Epā” (“Do not Allow the Suppression of Monks”), *Ātta*, August, 28, 1987.

<sup>83</sup> “Piriven Valata Ādāra Athituvē Janapati Niyamāyen” (“The Funds for the Pirivenas Stopped on President’s Order”), *Ātta*, Sept. 10, 1987. Some of the *pirivenas*, said to have been badly affected by the grant cuts, were Vidyaratana Pirivena in Horana, Sunetra Devi Pirivena in Pepiliyana, and Subhadarama Pirivena in Nugegoda (*Divayina*, Oct. 29, 1987).

to safeguard the Buddha Sāsana in Sri Lanka. “[It] is the biggest treason (*lokuma drōhikama*) the government committed against Buddhism.”<sup>84</sup> Several monks portrayed it as a “revenge on monks”<sup>85</sup> and questioned if that was the way a “righteous government” treated the “guardians of the nation” (*jātiyē muradēvatāvan*).<sup>86</sup>

It is in the context of authorizing the above “Buddhist” image of young monks that we must examine the relation between Buddhist monks and the JVP.<sup>87</sup> One could argue that if young monks came to be portrayed as “a ship without a captain,” the JVP became its captain who would later navigate the *sangha* to the battlefield to save the country. To do so, the JVP drew upon a particular kind of “Buddhist” language that remarkably paralleled the language in which the above image of young monks was constructed. We examine below what kinds of discourse made possible what kinds of “Buddhist” practices for young monks within the umbrella of the JVP, particularly in the late 1980s. Then we will look at the ways in which such practices came to be contested and construed as “unBuddhist” or “violent” in the context of the Premadasa administration.

### *Monks, the JVP, “Sacred Religious Duty”*

The Janata Vimukti Peramuna, founded in the late 1960s by Rohana Wijeweera, was/is predominantly a youth movement that tried to unseat two governments by armed revolt. On both occasions, the JVP failed. In 1971 the SLFP government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike subdued it by killing at least three thousand JVP supporters. Again in a bloody battle that lasted from August 1989 to January 1990, the Premadasa government crushed the movement by eliminating over

<sup>84</sup> “Piriven Adyāpanayata Pahara Gävve Äyi” (“Why Did the Government Attack the Pirivena Education”), *Dinarāsa*, Sept. 9, 1987.

<sup>85</sup> “Ätta, Sept. 25, 1987.

<sup>86</sup> *Dinarāsa*, Sept. 17, 1987.

<sup>87</sup> For a historical overview of the JVP, see Mick Moore, “Thoroughly Modern Revolutionaries.” For an account of the JVP during the late 1980s, see C.A. Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror*; Rohan Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?*; A.C. Alles, *The JVP, 1969-1989*.

twenty thousand JVP members.<sup>88</sup> Though exact figures are unknown, it is said that thousands among them were young Buddhists monks.

Since Jayewardene banned it in 1983, claiming that it instigated anti-Tamil sentiments during that year's July riots,<sup>89</sup> the JVP functioned as an underground movement with the support of many rural based young people drawn from all parts of the island. In the early 1980s, Buddhist monks, primarily university students, began to join the JVP. In fact, D.M. Ananda, a Buddhist monk-student at Peradeniya University who later gave up the robes to devote his entire time to the JVP, was considered to be number three in the organization.<sup>90</sup> It was only in the mid- and late 1980s, however, that the JVP concertedly recruited young monks, particularly from *pirivenas*. Before we go on to examine the tactics of recruiting monks, we must look at the kinds of rhetorical strategies that the JVP deployed to authorize a "Buddhist" image of the movement.

According to some of the JVP leaflets and handwritten documents in the 1980s—once even to possess these documents was to face the possibility of interrogation or abduction or even death—the JVP urged all patriots, including monks, to join the movement. Following its attack on two army camps to obtain weapons in 1987, for example, in one particular leaflet the Deshapremi Janata Vyaparaya (The People's Patriotic organization — DJV), which is considered to be the armed branch of the JVP, spelled out its objective:

We are always ready to liberate our motherland from all enemies; to pave the path for a free (*nivahal*), peaceful society; to follow in the footsteps of our former heroic brothers. We will use the weapons we obtained from the two army camps to defeat the enemies of the motherland. We will safeguard the motherland. We

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<sup>88</sup> Some estimate that the total number of JVP members killed by the security forces is about twenty two-thousand. Eight thousand from August 1987 to July 1989, and about fifteen thousand from August 1989 to January 1990. Over a period of three years, the JVP is said to have claimed more than seventeen thousand lives. See Gunaratana, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 269.

<sup>89</sup> On this, see "The Proscription July 1983," in Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror*, pp. 59-63.

<sup>90</sup> Chandraprema, *Sri Lanka: The Years of Terror*, p. 144.

will liberate our brothers from the suffering they are facing. The doors of our movement are open to every fearless (*nirbhīta*) citizen.<sup>91</sup>

The enemies that this passage refers to are none other than the government of President J.R. Jayewardene. What is remarkable is that written just a few weeks before the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord, the leaflet, like many others I have collected, refers to Jayewardene as *dēshadrōhī* (a traitor to the nation), a term that monks first used to blame Jayewardene.<sup>92</sup> The leaflet went on to announce that it is ready to liberate the country from the “traitor Jayewardene,” the LTTE “terrorists,” and the “Indian invaders” (referring to Rajiv Gandhi), all concerns that monks expressed on the above pages. Promising that they will be “victorious” (*api dinannemu*), the DJV concluded the message with the slogan, “motherland or death” (*mavbima nātnam maranaya*).

#### *The Saffron Army, “Motherland or Death”*

The JVP sought to authorize the choice of “motherland or death” as an “authentic Buddhist” practice for monks by adopting particular discursive strategies. The JVP leaflets, addressing them as “Venerable Sir” (*garu svāmin vahansa*), called upon monks to “rally” (*pela gāhev*), “lead” (*peramuna ganiv*), and “fight” (*satan karav*) against the government. They spoke of monks as the greatest “patriots” who “fought and sacrificed their lives” (*bhiksūna divi pudamin satan keruvōya*) for the motherland in the past.<sup>93</sup> According to one leaflet, “The venerable (*gauravanīya*) monks are implored with patri-

<sup>91</sup> A leaflet issued by the DJV, June 10, 1987. I thank Ajit Serasundara for providing me with these valuable leaflets.

<sup>92</sup> As far as my research indicates, in 1982 Yakkaduwe Paññarama first used this specific term to criticize the tenure of Jayewardene as Kelaniya’s minister. See “Kelaniyē Mantrīvarayāgē Dēshadrōhī Vyāpāraya” (“Traitorous Movement of the [former] Minister of Kelaniya”), *Dinakara*, June 17, 1982. Later Labuduwe Siridhamma called him just *drōhiyā*.

<sup>93</sup> “Jivita Bilidīma Nāvatiya Yutuyi” (“We must Stop the Sacrifice of Human Lives [to the LTTE]”), JVP leaflet, April 4, 1987; “Ācārya Molē Arshas Hevat Nalin Silva Saha Gōla Bālayō Sisu Balaya Bidīmata Dangalati” (“Nalin Silva and his Pupils are Trying to Destroy the Power of Students”), JVP leaflet, 1987.

otic devotion (*bhaktiye*) to fight.”<sup>94</sup> This calling carried a particular “Buddhist” ring because influential monks, as seen earlier, had already declared that monks were ready to lay down their lives for the unity of the country. The JVP reinforced this claim and authorized a space for monks to discharge their “Buddhist” duty. Put differently, for monks to join the JVP “army of patriots” (*dēshaprēmi hamudāva*) was to support a Buddhist movement that tried to reclaim the glory of their Buddhist country and the nation “betrayed” by the “unlawful” Jayewardene government.<sup>95</sup> To be a “patriotic [JVP] soldier” (*dēshaprēmi sebalā*) was to oppose the “unrighteous” (“unBuddhist”) government.

In calling on the patriotic soldiers to riot against the government of Jayewardene, whose [nonviolent] policies made “murderer Prabhakaran” [the leader of the LTTE] the “king” in the northeast,<sup>96</sup> the JVP, like some of the above mentioned monks, questioned not only the Buddhist identity of Jayewardene but also the Buddhist identities of the “senior monks” who supported both Jayewardene and his predecessor, President Premadasa. Seven months after Premadasa came to power (on the second anniversary of the accord), for example, the JVP berated some chief monks as “traitors of the country,” “men disguised as monks” (*shramana vēshadāri*) uttering “false words” in support of the government.<sup>97</sup> Such monks were marked for death because the JVP policy dictated that every traitor of the country should meet the punishment of death (*mavbimata drōhivannanta maranaya*). Thus, at this particular time, from the standpoint of the JVP, the monk — that is to say, the *undisguised, true* monk — was one who did not support the government, but would wage war against it to protect the country. To authorize this definition of the monk, the JVP employed a specific kind

<sup>94</sup> “Api Hamudā Kandavarū Valata Kadā Vādunē Äyi?” (“Why Did We Attack Army Camps?”), JVP Leaflet, July 27, 1987.

<sup>95</sup> JVP Leaflet, July 27, 1987.

<sup>96</sup> “Api Hamudā Kandavuru Valata Gävvē Äyi?”

<sup>97</sup> “Dēshaprēmi Sanhāraya Nāvatvīmata, Janatā Mardanaya Vālakvīmata Satan Vadiv!” (“Fight Against the Suppression of the Patriotic Movement and the Public”), JVP Leaflet, (late August?) 1989.

of “Buddhist” rhetoric. In a handwritten document entitled *Ranabima* (Battlefield), for example, it quoted one of the provocative poems of S. Mahinda, a famous Buddhist monk, who, though Tibetan by nationality, lived and composed Sinhalese poetry in Sri Lanka (in the twentieth century).

*Ātot ratata ādarayak sitin papā*  
*Atat payat oluvat venkalat kapā*  
*Katat kalat nāta editara gatiya papā*  
*Ayuktiyata atdeka osavanna epā*

If you love your country with your heart,  
 Even though they sever your hands, legs, and head,  
 Even though you cannot speak, be fearless;  
 To injustice, do not surrender.<sup>98</sup>

Circulated in the immediate wake of the battle between the Premadasa government and the JVP, *Ranabima* went on to invite all patriots to come forward “without fear” and protect the country, and it explained the urgency of that duty by use of specific canonical “Buddhist” imagery. First, it portrayed Premadasa as an “executioner” (*alugōsu janādhīpati*) who was trying to wipe out the JVP movement by “raiding Buddhist temples and firing on sacred Buddhist books. . . and killing and kidnapping innocent people [in the state search for the JVP].” It then portrayed the whole country as a “Visala Mahanuvara,” a popular ancient Indian city, which, according the Buddhist commentary (*khuddaka Pāṭi*), once ravaged by famine and death, and haunted by non-human beings, was restored to normalcy by the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. *Ranabima* pointed out that rescuing and making normal Sri Lanka the Visala was a “sacred [Buddhist] task” (*pūjanīya katayutta*).<sup>99</sup> To accomplish this sacred task, the JVP — perhaps in the absence of the Buddha and his *Arhants* who restored Visala city

<sup>98</sup> “Ranabima” *Dēshaprēmī Janatā Vyāpārāya*, Handwritten JVP newsletter, (late August?) 1989.

<sup>99</sup> “Premadasat Jayewardene Adipārēma Yayi” (“Premadasa Too Follows in the Footsteps of Jayewardene”), a leaflet issued by Wijeweera and Upatissa Gamanayaka, the second in command, August 9, 1989.

by sprinkling protective water (*pirit vatura*) on it! — instructed its members to “shed sweat and blood, and even sacrifice life (*dādiya lē vāl helalā, jīvitiyama vuva pudalā*)” to rebuild the country. The JVP promised to kill anyone who opposed it.<sup>100</sup>

Since the mid-1980s, as though demonstrating the seriousness of its purpose, the JVP assassinated many Sinhalese — politicians, security personnel, intellectuals, supporters of political parties, and other citizens — who opposed the JVP and who, by its definition, had become traitors. In 1987 it even tried unsuccessfully to assassinate President Jayewardene and members of his cabinet.<sup>101</sup> In the midst of such practices, young Buddhist monks came to form a crucial part of the JVP cadre.

A good example of monks’ support for the JVP is *Vinivida*, the only magazine run by monks of the Manava Hitvadi Bhikkhu Sanvidanaya (Bhikkhu Organization for Humanity). During its initial phase in 1984, the magazine claimed that it had no connection to any political party,<sup>102</sup> but later the JVP took control of it.<sup>103</sup> In fact its editor in the late 1980s, Kongasdeniye Ananda, was considered to be a key member of the JVP.<sup>104</sup> *Vinivida* proved to be a crucial conduit for the dissemination of the JVP “Buddhist” ideas among monks and lay Buddhists in Sri Lanka. It carried articles, poems, short stories, etc., focusing on many issues — the problem of “terrorism,” the open market economy, the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord, etc. It reinforced the ideas that the monk has a special role to play in politics and encouraged them to abandon “Buddhist meditation on death and three marks of existence” — suffering, impermanence, and no-soul — and join the fight.<sup>105</sup> It said

<sup>100</sup> A leaflet issued by Wijeweera, March 28, 1989.

<sup>101</sup> For more on the JVP assassinations and its destructions of state properties, see Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 237.

<sup>102</sup> *Vinivida*, no. 10, November-December 1986.

<sup>103</sup> Communication with Ajit Serasundara, Oct. 1996.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Ven. Sorata, lecturer at Peradeniya University, Dec. 1996.

<sup>105</sup> “Mē Satana: Ratē Muradēvatāvantayī” (“This Fight: For the Guardians of the Nation”), *Vinivida*, no. 9, July-August, 1986.

that the Buddha himself dictated such a role for monks when he said, “O monks, behave for the benefit of the people.”<sup>106</sup> Inviting all monks to be “united” against the government, *Vinivida* urged them to exercise the “power” of the “saffron army” (*kaha hamudāva*). As examples of the power of the monks, *Vinivida* published accounts of monks such as Udakendewala Saranankara who went to jail by rebelling against the colonial government. In an article entitled “The Showdown in the House of Punishment” (*dagageyi raga*), it talked about how Saranankara stood up to prison guards by refusing to take off his robe and wear the prison uniform. The article was meant to be a tribute to monks in prison at the time (from July 1987). It stated that going to prison for the protection of the nation from “spurious Buddhists (*īṇiyā bauddhayō*), who call themselves Sinhala and serve imperialists,” an obvious reference to the government, was a noble act.<sup>107</sup>

Such views of what a monk should be within the kind of Sri Lanka portrayed by these monks and the JVP, were rendered accessible to Buddhist monks in a variety of ways, and they were translated into action by many monks. By the late 1980s, the majority of the monastic student population at all universities had joined the JVP,<sup>108</sup> and they performed various tasks for the JVP. They drew posters and wrote flyers (which the government called “subversive literature”), organized rallies and demonstrations, and even hid weapons in their temples.<sup>109</sup> In July 1987, these university monks formed the majority of the *sangha* that took to the streets to protest the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord (more below).

<sup>106</sup> *Vinivida*, no. 9, July-August, 1986; *Vinivida*, no. 12, April, 1988.

<sup>107</sup> “Sukhā Sanghassa Sāmagghi” (“The Unity of the Sangha Brings About Happiness”), *Vinivida*, no. 12, 1988. The title of this article is part of a verse from the famous Dhammapada.

<sup>108</sup> Interviews conducted with monks at Kelaniya, Jayewardenepura, Peradeniya, and Colombo universities, 1995-1998.

<sup>109</sup> “Monks Held Along with Automatic Weapon,” *Sun*, August 11, 1987; Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 235.

A more notable feature of the JVP in the late 1980s was the support that it received from many younger monks between the ages of fifteen to twenty. Many of these young *pirivena* monks, as several monks indicated, came to believe that they were invincible because they belonged to the JVP. In the midst of mounting demands for Jayewardene's resignation in late September 1988, for example, several hundred young monks from Colombo gathered on Maligakanda road to demonstrate against the government, and they were later joined by several hundred students from Ananda Balika and Ananda College, Buddhist schools in the area. Despite the presence of the army and the police monitoring the scene, these monks rhythmically shouted provocative "fighting slogans" (*satan pāta*). Two such popular *satan pātas*, as recalled by a monk who observed the event, echo that particular ethos in Sri Lanka:

*yamav, yamav, perata yamav*

*JRva panna damav*

March, March, March forward!

Chase away JR

*JRva genalla, vangediyē damālā*

*mōlgahen kotāla, maduvaligen talālā*

*hadanawa api ānduwak*

Having brought JR, put him in a mortar,  
pounded him with a pestle, beaten him with the Madu tail,  
we will form a government.<sup>110</sup>

As time went on, some monks went further than simply shouting slogans. A few incidents, as recalled by monks, illustrate how some of these monks came to demonstrate that "fearless" monastic image. Once several hundred Buddhist monks were taking part in a JVP demonstration in Matara, and within minutes the police arrived on the scene. As some officers got out of their jeep and began to walk toward the crowd, the monk in charge of the demonstration pulled out a razor (*dālipihiya*) and flashed it around, threatening to cut them

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with a monk at a temple in Maradana, Oct. 1996.

if they dared come near the monks.<sup>111</sup> The officers pulled back, but later fired tear gas, dispersing the crowd.<sup>112</sup> Another monk recalled an incident involving student monks at a *pirivena* in Matara. Sometime in late 1989, as part of the island-wide strikes and work stoppage that the JVP carried out, young monks demanded that the principal cancel all classes and close the *pirivena* indefinitely. As the principal objected to the demand, the leader/monk of the group began to kick him in the face and the stomach. Later the police arrived on the scene, and the young monks, along with other men from the neighborhood, stoned and wrecked the police vehicle. The above informant, who also took part in this riot and who now denounces his peer's conduct, said that at the time "I felt I liked him beating up [the principal] (*gävvata kāmātiyi vage*) because I was in such a state of mind (*ehema manushikatvayak tibuenē*)."<sup>113</sup>

Atureliye Indaratana, a senior Buddhist monk from Matara and later an adviser to the Ministry of the Buddha Sāsana, told me of an incident unlike any other. One morning in late 1989, an unidentified person telephoned Indaratana to inform him that three monks from the Bhikhsu Balakaya (the Monastic Power Front) would visit him at his temple in Matara. The caller warned that if he failed to keep the appointment he should be prepared to face death on the road. Immediately the phone line was cut, and Indaratana knew he would surely die that day. A few minutes later, three "monks" carrying handguns showed up at the temple. Only one of them, Indaratana says, was a "real monk," and the other two seemed liked "robed men" because they wore their robes wrong. They ordered Indaratana to sit down. Pointing a gun to his head, one said, "if you betray the people, you must be prepared to face the punishment that people give." Then

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<sup>111</sup> A razor is part of the *atāpīrikāra* that contains the eight requisites of a monk, which is one of the most meritorious gifts Buddhists can donate to the *sangha*. I am told that in late 1989 many JVP monks carried razors as weapons to defend themselves against the "enemy."

<sup>112</sup> Interview with five monks at Kelaniya University, July 1995, 1996.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with ten monks at Jayewardenepura University, Oct. 1997.

they went on to question why Indaratana wrote to the newspapers supporting Jayewardene's decision to bring the Indian army to Sri Lanka. As Indaratana stated that he no longer held such views, the three guests demanded that he publish a letter in newspapers indicating so. Indaratana acquiesced and did so later. Following several hours of interrogation, the monks treated themselves to breakfast in the *dansāla* and left the temple, noting that they would return next week after reporting to the "head office." The head office would examine the facts and judge if Indaratana should undergo the punishment of death. The monks never came back, and Indaratana was spared.<sup>114</sup> My point here is that such practices of young Buddhist monks became possible in the context of the 1980s in which that *particular* image of the monk was authorized by both monks and the JVP. Yet this image came to be contested and construed as "violent," and therefore "unBuddhist," within the context of the Premadasa government.

*"Sacred (Religious) Duty" as "Violence"*

In late 1988, just about a month before Jayewardene stepped down from office, the JVP brought the country to a virtual standstill. It was as if it was another government. As Gunaratna, a Sri Lankan commentator on the saga of the JVP, points out, "In November 1988, it was the order of the JVP — the unseen government — which ran the country." He writes:

A state of near anarchy prevailed. People were threatened and kept away from work. No transport was available as several bus drivers who defied orders of the JVP were killed. The stoppage of work at the petroleum refinery resulted in long queues in front of gas stations. . . . People from the lower middle class queued to buy kerosene for lighting and cooking. Shops were closed for weeks and food shortage grew acute. Prison riots resulted in several deaths. Many were injured in prisons of Colombo, Mahara, Anuradhapura, Negombo and Pelwatte. Several prisoners escaped from the jails too. From Velikada 221 prisoners including Ragama Somae, a central committee member of the JVP and other high ranking members escaped. Bank, postal, and telecommunication facilities came to a virtual halt. Trees were cut and placed across the roads. Power pylons and

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<sup>114</sup> Interview with Atureliye Indaratana, Oct. 1997.

transformers were damaged and telephone exchanges sabotaged. Even hospitals were not functioning.<sup>115</sup>

Such was the state of affairs in Sri Lanka when Premadasa became President in December 1988. The JVP continued its activities well into mid-1989, seeking to unseat the Premadasa “illegal” government that they claimed came to power by “false votes” and followed in Jayewardene’s footsteps.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, the JVP began to portray an image of itself as a movement enjoying mass support, and sometimes it did receive it. It held massive rallies attended by thousands, and in some cases it coerced the public into being part of the audience.<sup>117</sup> As one Buddhist monk pointed out, the JVP “did some good things too” (*honda vādat kalā*). It prohibited the sale and drinking of illicit liquor (*kasippua*) and ordered the grocery shop owners to lower the prices of food items in various parts of Sri Lanka. “People, particularly the villagers, the monk continued, liked (*pāhādunā*) these kinds of things.” But after it started to “destroy public properties” in its effort to debilitate the government, people began to “intensely dislike” the JVP because things such as the prolonged transport strikes and stoppage of work affected the poor masses. But the monk quickly pointed to a widespread rumor that many of the JVP’s acts of sabotage — such as setting fire to buses, post offices, train stations, etc. — were in fact the work of the Premadasa government to undermine the JVP. Such rumors, the monk added, were “unclear” because the situation in the country then was so complex.<sup>118</sup>

In the face of the JVP’s supposed many killings and acts of sabotage, it must be noted, President Premadasa did not publicly accuse the JVP of any wrongdoing — at least not until November 1989. It is no secret that during the presidential election both Premadasa and

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<sup>115</sup> Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* pp. 293-294.

<sup>116</sup> “Premadasa Jayewardene Adipārēma Yayi.”

<sup>117</sup> Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 294.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Devalegama Medhananda, Oct. 1996. Gunaratna too says that “many Sri Lankans have been sympathetic to the views of the JVP but not to their methods.” Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 336.

the JVP presented an explosive political agenda, namely the “urgent” task of sending back the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) to India. In July 1989, Premadasa requested the JVP to join in his “Buddhist patriotic” quest for sending the IPKF back to India, but the JVP refused, claiming that it was their original idea.<sup>119</sup> As one informant said quite perceptively, by campaigning to remove the IPKF from Sri Lanka, Premadasa “wrested the flag from the JVP,” that is, its patriotic image. Shorn of that image, the JVP simply became an “armed man” (*tuvakkukārayek*) that the “patriotic Buddhist” government could and had to kill.<sup>120</sup> It did just that.

*Discovering “Buddhist Identity” in the “Criminal” of the JVP:  
Torture and “Rehabilitation” of Monks*

As early as August 1989, the government defense ministry, headed by Ranjan Wijeratne, a Buddhist himself, began a nationwide crack-down on the JVP by mobilizing a number of “paramilitary groups” or “death squads.” (Wijeratne, believed to be the mastermind behind the invention of these death squads, later said that he was able to stand up and wipe out the JVP not because he was a Premadasa man but “I follow the master’s [Buddha’s] teaching that there is nothing permanent.”<sup>121</sup>) Mostly operating by night, these death squads largely consisted of army or security personnel whose families the JVP threatened or killed, and they went on a spree of kidnapping, torturing, and killing not only those suspected to be the JVP members but also their families.<sup>122</sup> They raided houses, villages, towns, Buddhist temples, and *pirivenas*. Given the history of the monks’ support for the JVP, temples and *pirivenas* became a major target of the military investigation.

Raiding temples and arresting monks were an explicit form of questioning the “Buddhist” identity of the JVP monks. According to several eyewitness accounts, when the members of a death squad

<sup>119</sup> “Premadasa Jayewardene Adipārēma Yayi.”

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Rev. Sorata, lecturer at Peradeniya University, Dec. 1996.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* p. 336.

<sup>122</sup> For more on this, see Gunaratna, *Sri Lanka: A Lost Revolution?* pp. 295, 339-340.

raided a temple, they kicked down doors and ransacked rooms for JVP flyers and leaflets, all “evidence” that would link the monks to the JVP. If suspicious monks were found, before being “arrested,” they were ordered to strip themselves naked and wear bed sheets (taken from their temples) in front of their teachers or other monks, an act that symbolized the monks’ return to the lay status. If other resident monks at the temple intervened, they were attacked.<sup>123</sup> Some monks were even shot dead in their temples.<sup>124</sup> On different occasions, the monks were stripped naked and kicked into vehicles with no license plates in broad daylight, in full view of the public.<sup>125</sup> At this particular time, to be a member of the JVP was to face the possibility of losing one’s identity as a monk.

The arrested “monks” were detained and questioned for months at camps in various undisclosed locations throughout the country. The questioning entailed subjecting the suspected monks to particular techniques of physical punishment, and one such technique is worth noting because of its “Buddhist” connotation. It was called “hitting the *dharmacakka*” (*dharmacakke gahanvā*). *Dharmacakka* is a Pali canonical term and it stands for the “the wheel of the Dhamma,” a symbol of the early Buddhist doctrine about the condition of suffering, and the way out of it, that the Buddha set in motion in his first sermon.

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<sup>123</sup> Interviews and conversations with several monks at universities and *pirivenas* in Colombo, 1997. Recently a newspaper carried an account of a monk’s near-death encounter with one of the paramilitary groups at a temple. See “Tisek Denek Maladāmu Walpita Minīvala” (“The Grave in which Thirty-Three People were Buried”), *Divayina*, Nov. 24, 1996. Even during the height of the confrontation between the JVP and the government, other newspapers, rarely though, pointed out similar concerns. See “Sivuru Adanakada Galavā Mēsaredhi Andana Yugayak” (“This is an Era in which Monks are Stripped of their Robes and Forced to Wear Table Clothes”), *Dinarāsa*, Sept. 26, 1989.

<sup>124</sup> I have located a list of about one hundred names, addresses, dates, and places of kidnapping and killings of monks prepared by Students for Human Rights on Kinsey Rd., Colombo 8.

<sup>125</sup> Interviews with three monks at Peradeniya University and five monks at Jayewardeneperura University 1995-1996. These kinds of narratives were also related to me in informal conversations by many other monks and laypeople.

The monk who undergoes this punishment is made to resemble this wheel. One monk, who spent two months in a camp, described the details of meting out the punishment. The monk is ordered to squat on the ground, elbows encircling the knees; a pole is pushed under the knees and over the elbows. With the body hanging from it, the pole is lifted and placed on the arms of two chairs separated by some space between them. The body is then spun like a wheel and beaten with a bat until the victim passes out or bleeds to death. It is as if the state invented a specific kind of “Buddhist” punishment for a specific kind of “Buddhist” subject. That is to say, if the punishment of torturing the JVP monks was part of questioning their Buddhist monastic identities, the punishment must necessarily be rendered “Buddhist.”

It was in the midst of arresting and punishing the JVP monks that the government publicly contested the “patriotic” (Buddhist) identity of the JVP. In November 1989, immediately after the security forces captured and killed Rohana Wijeweera, the leader of the JVP who many considered to be invincible, President Premadasa addressed the parliament. In a lengthy speech describing the details of Wijeweera’s death, Premadasa contrasted his “peaceful” government with the “violent” JVP. Stating that “from the time [his] government came to power, it worked for peace,” the president questioned the JVP’s image of itself as a “patriot” movement that tried to liberate the country. He characterized the JVP as a “terrorist,” “criminal” organization whose “violence” posed a threat to a particular kind of “Buddhist” Sri Lanka.

The People of Sri Lanka are heirs to a great civilization. We are also heirs to a culture that values even the lives of very humble creatures like insects and ants and even of beings such as poisonous snakes. That is why our people condemn the destruction of any kind of life. That is why we condemn violence.<sup>126</sup>

As if to further demonstrate the danger of the JVP “violence” to this “great civilization,” Premadasa specifically pointed to the JVP killings of monks. Stating how “so many... Ven. members of the Mahasangha have been killed” who “have loved our country and our

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<sup>126</sup> “President Tells Government Parliamentary Group, ‘If Wijeweera Heeded My Call None Need Have Suffered,’” *Daily News*, Nov. 17, 1989.

religion,” the president read out more than twenty names of monks the JVP killed. He pointed out that the “killing of Venerable monks” attested to the “seriousness” of JVP violence. Reminding people of his election pledge to “reestablish peace in the country” and to “put an end to the suffering of the people,” Premadasa said he would not “allow the country and the people to be subverted” by the violence of the JVP. He then concluded his speech by appealing to all people of Sri Lanka to “fearlessly . . . come forward” and help the government “wipe out JVP terrorism and violence.”

Premadasa portrayed his government as the true “patriot” who will liberate the country from the JVP “terrorists.” The government tried to depict this image of itself in other ways. A few days before Premadasa’s speech to parliament, the government newspapers published a statement by, along with a mugshot of, a monk named Thalakolawewe Chandaratana, a prominent member of the JVP. Chandaratana’s statement, believed to have been obtained through torture, was a confession and atonement that clearly supported the government’s representation of the JVP as an unBuddhist movement that betrayed its objective by resorting to violence. Chandaratana castigated JVP’s killings of monks as “terrorist” and “ignoble” acts and said the JVP “failed to understand the [Buddhist] culture of the country.” He then appealed to the members of the JVP to “rally around [the government] to restore peace and unity in the country.”<sup>127</sup>

Having authorized an image of the JVP as a terrorist, criminal movement that must be eliminated, the Premadasa government intensified its nationwide search for the JVP cadres, a search that cost over a hundred lives a day. After the search ended in mid-1990, several hundred “monks” were left in detention camps. Given its depiction of the JVP as a “criminal” organization, the government could not simply release the monks, who now remained symbolically stripped of their former patriotic Buddhist monastic identities. In order to deal with this problem, the government employed a particular strategy. It gave the “JVP

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<sup>127</sup> “A Bhikkhu, Once a JVP Activist, Blows the Lid off the Movement,” *Daily News*, Nov. 14, 1989.

monks” new “non-JVP” Buddhist identities by subjecting them to a disciplinary process of “rehabilitation” (*punaruttāpanaya*).

I met one monk who first spent several months at a detention camp and later underwent a program called “redisciplining (the undisciplined) (*āyati samvara*)” at a rehabilitation center in Maharagama.<sup>128</sup> The government invited popular monks to give these ex-JVP monks supervised training in meditation, preaching *bana*, chanting *pirit*, practicing vegetarianism, alms-begging, and abstaining from eating at night, all practices, as the government deemed, should constitute the identity of a monk. It was a strategy of not only making ex-JVP monks “Buddhist” monks again, but making them specific kinds of monks, namely monks who are “non-JVP” and hence “nonviolent” and “disciplined.” The state symbolically inscribed this identity on the bodies of these monks by issuing them each a certificate testifying to the successful completion of the rehabilitation program. The state required that during travel the rehabilitated monks carry the certificate so as to avoid the future possibility of being arrested. The certificate, symbolizing the discipline of rehabilitation, identified the *Buddhist monk* “discovered in the criminal” of the JVP.<sup>129</sup>

The contestation — *criminalization* — of the JVP as a “terrorist” movement threatening the great Sri Lankan Buddhist civilization and its elimination authorized Premadasa to represent himself as the Buddhist president who destroyed “terror” and delivered his election promise to restore peace in Sri Lanka. However, various other competing narratives in this context began to contest the “Buddhist” image of Premadasa, eventually depicting him as the agent of terror who had come to dishonor the Buddhist country. For instance, this discourse

<sup>128</sup> An interview conducted with a Buddhist monk (who wishes to remain anonymous) in Maharagama, Nov. 1997. I thank Ajit Serasundara of Colombo University for making possible this important interview.

<sup>129</sup> I am borrowing this phrase from Michel Foucault’s discussion of the ways in which the “[hu]man” was “discovered in the criminal” in the context of “punishment without torture” in nineteenth century Europe. Foucault, of course, has in mind a broader epistemological space than the minute conjunctures of knowledge production that concern me here. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 74.

of terror was employed by other subsequent political parties. During the presidential campaign in 1994, a year after the death of Premadasa, Chandrika Bandaranaike made the election pledge to eliminate the Premadasa “era of terror.” After assuming office, Chandrika Bandaranaike set up various commissions to inquire into the disappearances of many people during the Premadasa government, including those of Buddhist monks. Recently one of her ministers, Mangala Samaraweera, read out in Parliament a list of (JVP) monks said to have been killed by the death squads in 1989.<sup>130</sup> Later, the government published the names of more than one hundred such “victim” monks from various parts of Sri Lanka. What is noteworthy is that its representation of these monks directly challenged the kind of image of terror that the Premadasa government produced of the JVP monks. Introducing the list of names, it said: “The fact that they tortured and killed young noble monks who gave up all life’s luxury to liberate the whole human kind from the wheel of *samsara*, is true (*satyavādiya*), real (*sābāya*). This is part of a list of such monks who became prey to the curse of a seventeen-year murderous [UNP] rule (*minimaru pālanaya*).”<sup>131</sup> And so continues the debate about what is and is not Buddhism or violence.

To sum up, my preoccupation here has been to propose alternative approaches to the conceptualization of the discursive formations of the relation between religion and violence, religious identity and difference. Conventional disciplinary narratives that tend to view religion and violence in terms of their difference or interrelation are governed by assumptions about the self-evidently defined nature of such categories. Such categories, I have wanted to insist, are not available as transparent objects of disciplinary knowledge, for the meanings of “religion” and “violence” are discursively produced and hence shifting within the context of different debates. Central to my argument was delineating some of the complex ways in which competing and rival discourses and debates authorized differing persons, practices, and

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Atureliye Indaratana, Nov. 1997.

<sup>131</sup> “Sārā Sankhya Kalpa Lakshayak Purā” (“Having Aspired [to Become Monks] for Infinite lifetimes”), *Dinamina*, Feb. 25, 1997.

knowledges to emerge and submerge, to come into (central) view and fade from view, to become centered and decentered as religion or violence, civilization or terror, and so on in contingent conjunctures — in this case the specific ethnographic landscape between the early 1980s and the 1990s in Sri Lanka.

In exploring this narrative terrain, working through those specific details, I have not, however, wanted to invoke some supposed authority of “ethnographic evidence” that would guarantee us a privileged epistemological purchase on religion and violence. Rather, I wish to read the content of this paper as a modest example of the contingency of the “native” ethnographic field. So one of my points is that our claims, which we stake on that ethnographic terrain, and which, more often than not, stand authorized as universally applicable knowledges about categories like religion, violence, culture, and identity in archives of disciplinary texts, must be contingently positioned. (Today the esteemed canonical status that these categories occupy is such that it is common to see the supposed culture of religious violence or religious nationalism in Sri Lanka mentioned right along with other places like Punjab, Iran, Egypt, Israel, Bosnia, Ireland, and so on.<sup>132</sup>)

My stress on the recognition of contingently produced native knowledges about such discursive concepts like religion, however, is not simply to advance the well-rehearsed postcolonial, postmodern argument about the non-essential, hybrid nature of religion and culture.<sup>133</sup> On the contrary, what I have labored to demonstrate were some of the strategic ways in which terms and parameters of what and who can and cannot be Buddhism or violence (nonBuddhism) were authorized to appear and disappear in those micro conjunctures. So if we are to understand religion, violence, and culture, as nonessential, “historical” ideas, that

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<sup>132</sup> See, for example, Mark Juergensmeyer, “Worldwide Rise of Religious Nationalism”; also his *Terror in the Mind of God*, and “What the Bhikkhu Said”; Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan*.

<sup>133</sup> David Scott has raised some important questions about this. See his *Formations of Ritual*, pp. xvii-xviii; and *Refashioning Futures*, particularly pp. 9-10.

is, as discursive traditions, or as “embodied arguments,”<sup>134</sup> we must, then, explore those micro spaces in which categories like religion and violence come to be invested with, and divested of, fleeting authoritative meanings. The failure to do so, in my view, lead to the uncritical reproduction of native knowledges about such categories. Take, for example, the concept of “terror(ism).” I have tried to demonstrate the emergence and submergence of altering debates about who and what could and could not be counted as “terror” within the specific bounds of those authoritative discourses and debates. The point that I want to make is that, without a critical genealogical awareness of the authorization of its deployment by rival discourses, it would be impossible to employ “terror” as a disciplinary synonym for, as another way of making sense of, the dynamics of that particular context and not reproduce its ideological meanings.<sup>135</sup>

This is not to say — to repeat a point worth repeating — that there is no “terror” as opposed to “religion.” Rather, fleeting knowledges of what is and is not terror are not available for canonization as they are conventionally understood in terms of “Buddhism Betrayed?,” “religious violence,” “religious terrorism,” etc., but must be located in those specific conjunctures. What I have sought to argue here bears a subtle relevance to a provocative question that Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass posed in their recent book on the Western discourses of terrorism: “What can we say about the fact that terrorism has

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<sup>134</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, particularly chapter 15, p. 222. For a fine discussion of tradition as an embodied argument, see Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, pp. 9-10, 122-123. On further attempts at conceptualizing Buddhism as a discursive tradition with “differential discursive positions,” see also his other seminal work, *Formations of Ritual*, pp. 187-191. Among others who have been helpful to me, and clearly to Scott’s work, in thinking about tradition in this way is Talal Asad. I have in mind here his *Genealogies of Religion*, particularly Chapter 6.

<sup>135</sup> On increasing disciplinary representations of violence in terms of “terror,” see, for example, P. Lawrence, *Work of Oracles, Silence of Terror*. See also Valentine Daniel’s very interesting “Embodied Terror.” For a critical engagement with Daniel’s text, see Jeganathan’s “Violence as an Analytical Problem.”

become such a shifty category that yesterday's terrorists are today's Nobel Prize winners?"<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Zulaika and Douglass, *Terror and Taboo*, p. x.

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# HEROISM, SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT, AND TRIADIC BONDS IN JAIN AND CHRISTIAN MENDICANCY AND ALMSGIVING\*

STEPHEN R. MUNZER

## *Summary*

Despite first impressions to the contrary, religions as radically different as Jainism and Christianity can shed light on each other's practices of mendicancy and almsgiving. They can do so because of a trio of general categories under which certain elements of Jain and Christian practices can be subsumed. The categories are heroism, spiritual development, and triadic bonds among mendicants, almsgivers, and one or more supernatural or superhuman beings.

There are at least two reasons why scholars of comparative religion, students of spirituality, philosophers of religion, and others should care whether it is possible to compare Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving. First, the categories used to examine Jain and Christian practices reveal an underlying structure that might be used to analyze other varieties of religious mendicancy and almsgiving. Second, demonstrating similarities between Jainism and Christianity provides empirical evidence that even quite different religions and cultures are not so self-contained that it is impossible to compare them. The demonstration undermines one sort of relativism in anthropology.

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## I. *Introduction*

In all societies, people sometimes ask for things from others, and sometimes those asked give things. Sometimes the asking and giving take place within a religious setting or have a religious dimension. Yet the societies and religions at stake vary enormously. Thus, some may doubt that one can ask any illuminating questions about asking and giving — and specifically about begging and almsgiving — in sharply different settings of this type. Here I examine and compare Jainism and Christianity, with specific reference to medieval Roman Catholic practices, beliefs, and attitudes as informed by contemporaneous interpretations of the Bible and theological discussions.

I argue that Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving can shed some light on each other, though considerable probing is necessary in order to ascertain exactly what the areas of cross-illumination are. The underlying reason for cross-illumination resides in three salient features of some religious societies. The features are (1) the heroic character of mendicancy and associated poverty and (sometimes) nudity, (2) the connection of begging and almsgiving with spiritual development, and (3) the triadic bonds among mendicants, almsgivers, and one or more supernatural/superhuman beings.

## II. *Mendicancy and Almsgiving in Jainism and Christianity*

### A. Defining terms

As used here, *mendicancy in practice* (voluntary begging) is soliciting, or at least standing ready to receive, money or other goods that is done, not out of necessity, but in place of gaining funds through work that the person could perform or through other channels that are open to him or her. *Mendicancy in attitude* is a complex web of beliefs, motivations, sentiments, and dispositions. The web can include, *inter alia*, humility, self-renunciation, and acknowledgment of dependence. An *ideal* is a model way of living that is extraordinarily, and not merely instrumentally, good.<sup>1</sup> A *religious mendicant* is someone who either

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<sup>1</sup> Munzer 1999b: 306-07.

engages in voluntary begging, or cultivates mendicancy in attitude, or both, for religious reasons.

#### B. A sketch

It is hard to imagine a religion that puts begging and almsgiving any closer to its center than Jainism. Taken together the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* and the *Kalpa Sūtra* devote more than 100 pages to religious begging.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 5 of the *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*<sup>3</sup> is also quite detailed.

Consider the distinction between religious (monks and nuns) and laity, and the difference between Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jainism. It is difficult, if not impossible, for scholars to recover an original, undifferentiated Jainism. Beginning in the fifth or fourth century B.C.E., there developed gradually a sectarian division between two groups of Jains: the Digambars (“sky-clad” or “clothed in space”) and the Śvetāmbars (“white-clad”).<sup>4</sup> The Digambar and Śvetāmbar traditions are riven over begging, nudity, and the position of women in religious life.<sup>5</sup> They also have, historically, somewhat different views of right belief and right conduct.<sup>6</sup>

The dominant contemporary Digambar practice is for men to renounce gradually later in life, though this practice does not coincide with the mendicant ideal found in Digambar biographies of Jinas and famous monks. The aspiring monastic beggar goes through a ceremony of initiation (*dīkṣā*) in which he renounces all possessions, receives a whisk broom in order gently to sweep away insects from wherever he sits and sleeps, and pulls the hair from his head.<sup>7</sup> The monk, who is naked, receives food in his upturned palms and in eating employs no

<sup>2</sup> Jacobi 1884: vol. 1, 64-78, 88-179, 296-311.

<sup>3</sup> Lalwani 1973: 58-112; Schubring 1977: 206-15.

<sup>4</sup> On dating see Dundas 1992: 40-44; Jaini 1979: 5 and n.6. For paraphrase of sect names see Jacobi 1925; Jaini 1979: 4-6.

<sup>5</sup> Babb 1996: 56-58; Dundas 1992: 117-19, 129-60; Jaini 1979: 38-41, 217-21.

<sup>6</sup> Williams 1963.

<sup>7</sup> Jain and Fischer 1978: Part One, Plates XVI b) and c), XVII, XVIII a) and b), XIX a), XX b); Jaini 1979: 243-45.

utensils or dinnerware.<sup>8</sup> This ascetic nudity signifies nonattachment to material things and liberation from shame and sexual desire.<sup>9</sup> Mendicancy and associated renunciations are thus liminal phenomena.<sup>10</sup> Undergirding this total renunciation is the hope of attaining *nirvāṇa* and release (*mokṣa*) — that is, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death.<sup>11</sup> The soul (*jīva*) thus emancipated continues to exist as a liberated entity (*siddha*) in a special place (*tanu-vāta*).<sup>12</sup>

Digambar “nuns” are, technically, religiously advanced laywomen, because they may not engage in ascetic nudity.<sup>13</sup> Female Digambar renouncers cannot, as women, achieve *mokṣa*.<sup>14</sup> They can, however, be reincarnated as men. So reincarnated, they are eligible to become monks and thence attain *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa*.<sup>15</sup> For all Digambara — lay and religious, male and female — all spiritual life is a preparation for a holy death.<sup>16</sup> “Death while in meditation” after prolonged fasting is the ideal death.<sup>17</sup> Such a death is connected with the doctrine of nonharming (*ahimsā*).<sup>18</sup>

The Śvetāmbaras are less strict than the Digambaras in several respects. At the initiation ceremony, the new Śvetāmbar monk receives a blanket, a staff, a bowl for begging, and a wardrobe consisting of three large pieces of white cloth. The Śvetāmbaras regard women as the spiritual equals of men, and the entering nun goes through the same sort of ceremony. Two Śvetāmbar sects — the Sthānakvāsī and the Terāpanthī — bestow on monks and nuns a white face-mask or strip of

<sup>8</sup> Jain and Fischer 1978: Part One, Plates XXI b), XXII d), XXIII b); Jaini 1979: 39-41, 219-20.

<sup>9</sup> Jaini 1979: 13, 39-41.

<sup>10</sup> Turner 1969: 145 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Jaini 1974; Jaini 1979: 82, 140-41, 260-67, 273; Singh 1974.

<sup>12</sup> Jaini 1979: 130 and n.61, 270-71.

<sup>13</sup> Jaini 1979: 246.

<sup>14</sup> Jaini 1979: 39-40, 246 and n.8.

<sup>15</sup> Jaini 1979: 39.

<sup>16</sup> Jaini 1979: 232-33.

<sup>17</sup> Caillat 1977; Jaini 1979: 226; cf. Jaini 1979: 1, 227-40; Schubring 1962: 288-90.

<sup>18</sup> Chapple 1993: 99-109.

cloth (*muh-patti*) to cover the mouth except at meals. Its purpose is to safeguard tiny airborne creatures that might be harmed by warm breath at full force.<sup>19</sup> Śvetāmbar monks and nuns beg with a bowl or pot and eat more frequently than Digambar monks.<sup>20</sup> Śvetāmbar mendicants regard nudity as a theoretical option, but as a practical matter are clad (in white).<sup>21</sup> Among Śvetāmbars, women need not first be reincarnated as men to attain *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa*.<sup>22</sup> All Jains have an ideal of death while in meditation, as found in the concept of *samādhi maraṇa*.<sup>23</sup>

Central to Jain asceticism is the doctrine of karma. In Jainism karma is seen as a physical substance that adheres to the soul. Karma divides into two types: harming (*ghātiyā*) and nonharming (*aghātiyā*). Incorrect views and actions attract harming karma to the soul, and its adherence to the soul both blocks *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* and dictates the conditions of the next embodiment. The manifold renunciations of the Jain ascetic remove karma from the soul. This removal engenders a better present or future life. It also creates the conditions that can emancipate the Jain from the cycle of rebirth altogether.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, an “orthodox” Christian believes that, whether salvation depends on faith or actions or grace or some combination of these, some kinds of life are more pleasing to God than others. Religious mendicancy is not required of Christians. But Christianity contains room for ideals. Just as voluntary poverty practiced in imitation of Christ is a possible ideal, so is mendicancy in the form of voluntary begging for religious reasons, as well as mendicancy in attitude.<sup>25</sup>

Still, religious mendicancy is hardly at the core of the Christian tradition. The New Testament encourages giving alms to the poor.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Jaini 1979: 245, 263-64 (plates 29 and 30).

<sup>20</sup> Jain and Fischer 1978: Part One, Plate XXIII c); Jaini 1979: 40-41, 219, 246 n.8.

<sup>21</sup> Jaini 1979: 39.

<sup>22</sup> Jaini 1979: 39-40.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Bilimoria 1992: 336-38; Shāntā 1985: 178, 477.

<sup>24</sup> Dundas 1992: 83-90; Jaini 1979: 111-27.

<sup>25</sup> Munzer 1999a, 1999b.

<sup>26</sup> Matt. 19:21, 25:35-43; Mark 10:21; Luke 6:30, 12:33, 18:22.

It nowhere urges begging. Yet strands within the Christian tradition recognize begging for religious reasons. Indeed, the mendicant friars, especially the Dominicans and Franciscans of the thirteenth century, depended to some extent materially on begging and employed begging as a means of spiritual development.<sup>27</sup> Aquinas and Bonaventure wrote some spirited defenses of religious mendicancy.<sup>28</sup> The Dominicans and Franciscans often made common cause against other clerics but sometimes differed sharply with each other, and the Franciscans differed among themselves over poverty and strictures against ownership.<sup>29</sup>

Even the Christian mendicant orders in the middle ages used begging mainly out of occasional necessity while traveling and in punctuation of a larger life of work, teaching, preaching, and prayer. Begging was not an end in itself; for the Dominicans it was connected with preaching on circuit, and for some Franciscans with the practice of absolute poverty. Historically, nudity played virtually no role in Christian begging. Today Dominicans and Franciscans do almost no one-on-one public begging. In the twentieth century, even a Franciscan could ask whether mendicancy, in the sense of voluntary begging, is obsolete.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, the economic, social, cultural, philosophical, and theological differences between Jainism and Christianity are so large that it might seem scarcely imaginable that either tradition of religious mendicancy and almsgiving could shed any light on the other. Though gift practices are important in all societies,<sup>31</sup> economically and socially the Indian system of *dāna* (giving, or charity)<sup>32</sup> is more enveloping and persistent than anything seen outside all but a few other societies.

Begging practices also differ in another way. Extremely detailed rules govern begging by Jain monks and nuns. Begging for food and drink may occur only during a certain period each day and

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<sup>27</sup> Southern 1970: 286-92.

<sup>28</sup> Aquinas 1864, 1902, 1975; Bonaventure 1882, 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Brooke 1975; DeVine 1989; Lambert 1961.

<sup>30</sup> Hubaut 1987.

<sup>31</sup> Mauss 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Cort 1999; Nath 1987; cf. Parry 1986.

within a limited area. Jain mendicants may beg only from respectable houses and in accordance with a half dozen or so walking paths — quadrangular, spiral, zigzag, and so on. They may consume only certain foods, and must eat what has been given promptly, save when fasting. Even a concise summary of these rules runs to some pages<sup>33</sup> — though one cannot assume that either ancient, medieval, or contemporary practice observes textual rules to the letter. In contrast, even those Christians who practice or write favorably about religious begging mainly invoke general guidelines and thus make room for discretion. Aquinas, for example, writes that begging by religious is to be “done with moderation, for need and not to excess, and without undue insistence, with consideration for the circumstances of the persons from whom the request is made, and for the place and time.”<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, some rules did exist — for instance, pertaining to the territorial begging limits of individual houses of the Austin Friars.<sup>35</sup>

### C. Posture, gestures, and nudity

In the act of begging, Śvetāmbar and Digambar monks differ somewhat in posture and gesture. The former hold begging bowls. The latter receive food in upturned palms. Yet the debate between them is not so much over how to receive food but over how to practice nonpossession (*aparigraha*). Here the Digambars maintain that using a bowl would be using a possession, whereas the Śvetāmbars hold that the mendicant does not own or personally possess the bowl, but has it only on long-term loan from the laity. Although life in Christian communities, both Protestant and Catholic, depends on voluntary gifts elicited by institutionalized requests for money, because voluntary begging in public plays such a small role in Christianity, the Christian may see little point in debating exactly how to do it. Yet if mendicancy in attitude can be a Christian ideal, it is worth

<sup>33</sup> Schubring 1962: 270-78.

<sup>34</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk. III, ch. 135, ¶ 20 (p. 128).

<sup>35</sup> Roth 1966: vol. 1, 225-26, 229.

thinking about what posture and gestures reveal. Even Śvetāmbar begging practices might seem to express humility and gratitude. And the Digambar monk who begs with upturned hands might appear to adopt a posture of supplication, dependency, and perhaps prayer. The qualification “perhaps” is important, because different religions can have different conceptions of what prayer is, and in fact the upturned hands of the Digambar monk do not express or involve either prayer or supplication. Still, the Christian who seeks to develop mendicancy in attitude might think about posture and gestures in connection with prayer — for example, standing or kneeling, with hands folded or arms raised, bowing or genuflecting or prostrating. The Christian might also reflect on the beliefs, sentiments, and dispositions that mark out someone as a beggar from God — and the ways in which these are expressed.

Nudity demands a fuller examination than posture and gestures. Śvetāmbars and Digambars agree that Mahāvīra was naked. They disagree over whether nudity is a requirement in the Jain mendicant ideal. Yet they also agree on the points of nudity for the religious mendicant: renunciation of possessions, overcoming shame, and emancipation from sexuality.

Christians see the matter differently. The climate in many countries makes nudity impractical or dangerous. If poverty is an ideal, one can renounce individual ownership and wear clothes supplied by a religious community. More important, Christianity has often been ambivalent about the unclothed body. Perhaps to be naked is a reason to feel shame<sup>36</sup> and a cause of inappropriate sexual feelings in oneself and others. The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1-13 is very much a tale of lost innocence and shame. An important development in late Roman Christianity is the replacement of secular acceptance of nudity with stricter religious standards of modesty.<sup>37</sup> Subsequent developments are much too complicated to chronicle here.

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<sup>36</sup> Munzer 1999b: 316-18.

<sup>37</sup> Brown 1988: 315-17, 320-21, 416-17, 437-38.

### III. A Test Case: *The Noble Friar in the Fioretti*

The foregoing sketch seems to render bleak the outlook for any illuminating comparison between Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving. Yet I suggest that a story from medieval Catholic literature sets the stage for a potentially promising comparison, which Sections IV, V, and VI unfold in detail. Consider, then, a tale from the *Fioretti* — a set of stories about Francis of Assisi:

At Civitanova there was a certain friar of noble parentage named Michael who simply would not go out to beg because he was ashamed.

Now it happened that St. Francis came there, and he was told about that friar. The Saint scolded him very severely, and under holy obedience he commanded him to go alone, naked with only his breeches, to beg in a certain village that was about a mile away.

He humbly obeyed, and out of obedience went naked to beg, having set aside all shame. And he received enough bread and enough grain and other things, and he returned to the house burdened. And from that day he felt such joy and grace that as long as he lived he did not want to do anything but go and beg.<sup>38</sup>

If this story is intended to support a Christian ideal of voluntary begging, its main themes are obedience, humility, setting aside shame, and probably the imitation of Christ.<sup>39</sup> For present purposes, though, the nudity of Michael is salient. To read the tale charitably, one may suppose that Michael is not an exhibitionist, and that he does not set aside “all” shame but only such shame as relates to begging while naked. One may suppose, too, that his complete nakedness does not violate — is rather an enthusiastic response to — Francis’s order to beg naked “except for his breeches.”

The story is instructive for the light it throws on Christian mendicancy in attitude. Michael’s nakedness removes all barriers between him and other human beings and, more importantly, between him and God. His nudity signals his dependence on God. Michael is in no po-

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<sup>38</sup> Habig 1991: 1497. The story is traceable to the *Actus Beati Francisci* (Sabatier 1902: 193-94).

<sup>39</sup> Munzer 1999b.

sition to insist on his own will. His nudity symbolizes his willingness to display his true self to God (cf. Hebrews 4:13) and to others. His nudity also reflects trust in and surrender to God. Michael's overcoming anxieties about feeling ashamed is a relinquishment of a certain attachment to self and consequently is an abandonment of self to God. So understood, the tale of the noble friar is a story of a radical Christian faith.

It is possible to relate Michael's nakedness to the monastic adage, derived from St. Jerome, "naked, following the naked Christ" (*nudum Christum nudus sequere*).<sup>40</sup> Christ did not go about his ministry naked but was naked on the cross (though is rarely so depicted in Christian iconography). Hence, one way to imitate Christ is to practice a sort of metaphoric nakedness. Jerome himself connects following Christ with becoming "more humble and more poor" (*humiliores... et pauperiores*).<sup>41</sup> Medieval Christian asceticism ties this spiritual nudity to the imitation of Christ.<sup>42</sup> Yet the monastic adage stresses metaphoric or spiritual nakedness, not carrying out one's ministry naked or overcoming shame by doing so. Indeed, nothing in the tale of Michael states that from that day on all his begging was done naked.

One can link these thoughts to the nature of God and divine providence in the following way. The Christian tradition stresses trust more than acceptance in regard to mendicancy in attitude. Trust involves interdependence with others and dependence on God. It also involves a confidence that matters will turn out satisfactorily. This value, taken to an extreme, suggests that fully to trust in God is to do nothing to provide for one's material needs. Any such suggestion seems implausible. Yet how does one draw the line?

Aquinas's discussion of divine providence helps with this question by maintaining, in effect, that one should distinguish *inaction* from

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<sup>40</sup> Jerome 1933: 438-39.

<sup>41</sup> Jerome 1933: 438-39.

<sup>42</sup> Châtillon 1974; Grégoire 1972.

*solicitude*.<sup>43</sup> Inaction is doing nothing, except to wait for God to do something. Human beings have a spiritual and a bodily nature. Insofar as they have the latter they require food and, in most climes, clothing and shelter. So one cannot just sit naked and wait for food to drop out of the sky. Thus,

to look to God for help in those matters in which a man can help himself by his own action, and to omit one's own action, is the attitude of a fool and a tempter of God. Indeed, this is an aspect of divine goodness, to provide things not by doing them directly, but by moving others to perform their own actions. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Solicitude is caring and perhaps even worrying about things. To be solicitous about what pertains to one — viz. one's own work and other actions — is permissible and appropriate. But God asks one not to be solicitous about what pertains to God — viz. the outcome of one's work and other actions. Here one should place one's trust in God's providence. One ought not to be anxious or despairing about what will happen tomorrow.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, at least to the Christian who follows Aquinas, complete inaction by a religious mendicant is foolish, and conflicts with a proper understanding of divine providence. Aquinas puts his finger on this point when he describes “a marvelously absurd consequence.” If one reasons that caring about sleeping and eating is set aside because it interferes with contemplation, then “on the same reasoning, one could say that he does not wish to walk, or to open his mouth to eat, or to avoid a falling stone or a plunging sword, but would rather wait for God to do something.”<sup>46</sup> So it is a mistake to claim that trusting in God implies doing nothing to provide for one's own material needs.

There is an interior dimension to mendicancy. Two friars of the same order may work on humility as part of mendicancy in attitude. They understand humility not only as a disposition to value oneself

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<sup>43</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk.III, ch. 132, ¶¶ 27-30 (pp. 176-77); bk. III, ch. 135, ¶¶ 24-25 (pp. 189-90).

<sup>44</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk. III, ch. 135, ¶ 24 (p. 189).

<sup>45</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk. III, ch. 135, ¶ 25 (pp. 189-90).

<sup>46</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk. III, ch. 132, ¶ 30 (p. 177).

appropriately without exaltation or the trumpeting of good qualities and achievements. For them humility also includes a keen awareness of the distance between themselves and God. The two friars may be splendidly helpful to each other. But neither may be of much assistance to any Jain monk who is interested in self-control or equanimity. On grounds of content, the Jain monk will have to reject that part of their understanding that brings humility and God into the matter. By the same token, analogies exist between some Jain internal austerities (inner *tapas*)<sup>47</sup> and some Christian “spiritual exercises.” For example, repentance (*prāyaścitta*) is common to Jain monks<sup>48</sup> and Jesuit priests.<sup>49</sup> But many Jain internal austerities differ in content from many Christian spiritual exercises, and Jesuits are neither monks nor mendicants.

Jain mendicants exhibit serenity, self-knowledge, and acceptance of death. Christians who view themselves as beggars from God might develop these qualities without abandoning their emphasis on humility, self-renunciation, and acknowledgment of interdependence with others and dependence on God.

The posture, gestures, and nudity of Jain mendicants, interpreted symbolically, illuminate some key features of Christian mendicancy in attitude. Upturned palms suggest supplication and petitionary prayer. Nakedness intimates the removal of barriers between oneself and God, as well as willingness to display one’s true self before God. Nudity likewise reflects trust in and surrender to God, and thus for the Christian marks out a radical faith. The Jain, in turn, can view these symbolic interpretations as clarifying the inward point of voluntary religious begging.

In sum, despite the radical differences between Jainism and Christianity identified in Section II, upon examination one can descry similarities as well. Now the issue becomes whether these similarities can

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<sup>47</sup> Jaini 1979: 250-51.

<sup>48</sup> *Uttarādhyāyana Sūtra* 26.30-31, Jacobi 1884: vol. 2, 179; Shāntā 1985: 250, 284-8 5, 384-94, 509.

<sup>49</sup> Ignatius 1992: 43-44.

be elaborated in a coherent framework that simultaneously acknowledges differences and shows why an illuminating comparison between Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving is possible. I suggest that we attend to three general categories under which certain elements of Jain and Christian practices can be subsumed. The categories are heroism, spiritual development, and triadic bonds.

#### IV. *Heroism*

As understood here, heroism consists of dispositions, qualities, and actions that move a person to transcend the reality of everyday life by overcoming resistance or understandable fear. Heroes are disposed to act in ways that go against the grain of ordinary habits and customs. These ways of acting reflect a desire to get in touch with a spiritual reality that lies beyond ordinary living.

In Jainism, mendicancy is perceived as heroic. Most people are reluctant to depend upon the charity of others for the necessities of life, especially food. The risks of mendicancy are palpable in India, where over centuries people have worried, and do worry, about being forced to beg. Mendicancy is part of the broader asceticism of Jain monks — an asceticism also understood as heroic for similar reasons in related religious cultures, such as that of the Buddhist forest monks of Sri Lanka.<sup>50</sup>

The heroic aspect of Jain mendicancy extends to self-chosen poverty as well. Jainism evolved in a society with spectacular differences of wealth and power. As with Hindu and Buddhist ascetics, the Jain ascetic renouncer (*sannyasin*) is regarded by ordinary householders as the exemplar of a supreme religious ideal.<sup>51</sup> Well-to-do Jains have struggled against vices that might issue from conspicuous wealth; wealth is not corrupting if it is used appropriately.<sup>52</sup> Choosing to be poor, then, underscores the way in which a specifically religious poverty and powerlessness in this world point to a spiritual world in

<sup>50</sup> Carrithers 1983: 69-136, esp. 102.

<sup>51</sup> Fuller 1992: 17.

<sup>52</sup> Laidlaw 1995.

which true wealth and power are quite different from what they seem to be to earthbound individuals. All ascetic acts build up spiritual energy in renouncers, which thereby makes them immensely powerful in a spiritual sense.

Among Digambar monks, nudity is also heroic. True, the climate in parts of India makes it easier to go unclothed than it would be in Europe or the United States. Yet in areas of India formerly under Islamic control, Muslim rulers banned<sup>53</sup> or at least discouraged public nudity. Even today, non-Jain Indians view the nakedness of Digambar *munis* with disapproval. As Michael Carrithers explains, “One moves only slowly toward being fully naked — first you have a small upper body cloth and loincloth, then only the loincloth, and only then do you renounce covering altogether. The casting off of clothing is celebrated in ritual, and is clearly understood as an ascetic and therefore heroic act.”<sup>54</sup> Even Mahāvīra is said to have renounced clothing only gradually.<sup>55</sup>

In Jainism, the Śvetāmbar critics criticize Digambar monks who practice nakedness on the ground that it involves a hopeless attempt to replicate the behavior of the founder of Jainism, Mahāvīra. It makes no sense, so the Śvetāmbar claim, to attempt to conform to scriptural models of past practice, especially as even the very ancient texts are ambiguous about the appropriateness of nudity.<sup>56</sup>

The Digambar view the matter of nudity quite differently.<sup>57</sup> They hold that the Śvetāmbar are heretical with respect to the rules of nonpossession that apply to mendicant disciples of Mahāvīra. They do not accept as authentic such Śvetāmbar texts as the *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*.<sup>58</sup> Digambar may point to such texts as the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, which is accepted by both sects, and which includes nudity among

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<sup>53</sup> Jaini 1979: 308 n.58.

<sup>54</sup> Carrithers 1998.

<sup>55</sup> *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* I.8.1.1, 3, Jacobi 1884: vol. 1, 79.

<sup>56</sup> Dundas 1997.

<sup>57</sup> Carrithers 1989.

<sup>58</sup> Jaini 1998.

twenty-two hardships to be endured.<sup>59</sup> A recent translation of this work contains a gloss from a Digambar commentary indicating that even in India nudity may not come easily:

Nudity... is an essential feature of monkhood. . . . The purpose of nudity is to gain control over the feeling of shame in the state of unconcealed genitals. The ascetic is naked as a new-born baby, without possessions, not even a piece of cloth to cover his body. His mind is always fixed on the path of liberation being absolutely free of sexual desire and devoted to the practice of perfect celibacy.<sup>60</sup>

Heroism is detectable in Christian mendicancy, though it may emphasize, compared to Jain mendicancy, service to others more than the overcoming of self. Nowhere is heroism more visible than in Francis of Assisi and the early Franciscans. Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, records how Francis and the brothers, returning from Rome to the Spoleto valley, begged in the city of Orte. "Some of them would go into the city and get the necessary food, and what little they could get by begging from door to door, they would bring back to the other brothers."<sup>61</sup> Contemporary historians sometimes characterize the poverty and mendicancy of Francis, as depicted by his early biographers, as heroic.<sup>62</sup>

Medieval Christian begging was centrally linked to an ideal of poverty<sup>63</sup> and thence to a core feature of the gospels. Simon Tugwell, a Dominican, points out:

One very obvious expression of Franciscan poverty was begging, and some later sources suggest that Francis laid a certain emphasis on begging as a gesture of humility. . . .

Francis' central concern is quite clear. It is not poverty, as such, that he values, it is rather the readiness to be in a position in which it is impossible for you to insist on your own will.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Umāsvāti 1994: Ch. 9, sec. 9, 225.

<sup>60</sup> Umāsvāti 1994: 226.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Celano c. 34, Habig 1991: 257.

<sup>62</sup> Brooke 1967: 181; cf. Southern 1963: 320 ff..

<sup>63</sup> Munzer 1999a, 1999b.

<sup>64</sup> Tugwell 1985: 131.

As much is evident in passages from Thomas of Celano's first biography of Francis.<sup>65</sup>

Like the Desert Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, medieval mendicant friars took literally some Matthean and Lucan passages on the renunciation of wealth and the embrace of radical poverty. "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth. . . . But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworms destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal."<sup>66</sup> "Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven'."<sup>67</sup> "Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff."<sup>68</sup> "And come follow me" is the injunction or implication in each of these passages. In the Desert Fathers, asceticism included poverty but not mendicancy, preaching, or regulated strictures against ownership — yet it did aim to transform the inner self.<sup>69</sup> Renunciation of wealth, security, and the pleasures of consumption goes against the fiber of habit and "common sense." The welcoming of thoroughgoing poverty, with mendicancy included, as in the case of the medieval friars, is a heroic step that reaches out for a spiritual reality. Christianity, too, can see mendicancy as a liminal stage.

Nudity has no strong grip on Christian heroic expression, but it is possible to descry it in isolated stories. When St. Francis renounced his earthly father to embrace his Father in heaven, he cast off his clothes before the bishop of Assisi and all assembled. "Moreover, not even retaining his trousers, he stripped himself completely naked before

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<sup>65</sup> 1 Celano cc. 24, 35, 39, Habig 1991: 246-47, 257-58, 261-62.

<sup>66</sup> Matt. 6:19-20; cf. Luke 12:33-34. Quotations are from the New Jerusalem Bible.

<sup>67</sup> Matt. 19:21; cf. Luke 18:22.

<sup>68</sup> Matt. 10:9-10; cf. Luke 9:3.

<sup>69</sup> Linge 1990.

all.”<sup>70</sup> So, too, Michael the noble friar “went naked to beg” out of obedience to Francis, and in doing so “set aside all shame.”<sup>71</sup>

As regards mendicancy, common to both Jainism and some strands within Christianity is an emphasis not only on supererogatory acts but also on the dispositions and qualities that accompany the acts. The acts are saintly in the broad sense of marking an exceptionally holy life. They are also heroic in the sense specified at the beginning of this Section. The figure of the saintly hero in Jainism is nicely brought out by Carrithers.<sup>72</sup> The heroism of the Jain mendicant lies in his begging for food, his adoption of poverty, and his practice of nudity — all ascetic acts that impart normative value to a spiritual world. So, too, in Christianity an occasional hero is the figure who renounces worldly goods to lay up treasure in heaven, begs for the necessities of life, sets aside or gets past shame in begging naked, and trusts radically in God by being in no position to insist on his or her own will. Here, too, these heroic acts run against the grain of ordinary life and strive for spiritual expression.

#### V. *Spiritual Development*

Spiritual development is a category of great importance in both Jainism and Christianity. A link between heroism and spiritual development is that the religious hero sometimes pursues spiritual development to a noteworthy but still justifiable extreme. One can explore the category of spiritual development by visualizing a four-part grid: Jainism and Christianity form the columns, and mendicancy and almsgiving create the rows. The exploration distinguishes as necessary between Digambar and Śvetāmbar Jainism.

Why does a Jain monk beg? To put oneself in the position of a beggar is to express, and reinforce, freedom from possessions. It is part of a religious journey that prepares a monk or nun for a holy death — above all a “death while in meditation” after prolonged fasting. The

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<sup>70</sup> 1 Celano c. 15, Habig: 241.

<sup>71</sup> Habig 1991: 1497.

<sup>72</sup> Carrithers 1992: 92-116.

journey reveals a concern to purge attachment to self. It also reveals a concern for life and nonharming — in, for example, the Digambar's whisk broom, the Śvetāmbar's cotton broom, and the *muh-pattis* of some Śvetāmbar. The monk or nun seeks purification, cultivates understanding of self and life, and pursues, ultimately, *nirvāṇa* and release from the cycle of reincarnation.

However, Jain ascetics' begging for food is not perceived in terms of abasement or humility. The Śvetāmbar (since the medieval period) call the whole process *gocarī*, which means loosely "grazing like a cow," in reference to its supposedly random nature, as stressed in the *Daśavaikālika Sūtra*.<sup>73</sup> So far as the ideology of Jain mendicancy is concerned, "begging" monks and nuns are fulfilling important religious and social roles by enabling laypeople to gain religious merit through giving. As Cort puts it, "Jains are very explicit that the Jain mendicant does not beg (*bhīkh māgvū*) for food. Rather, in theory the laity request that the mendicant take food to maintain the body while on the path to liberation."<sup>74</sup> Very often, then, postures and gestures of humility are adopted by the *giver*, not the recipient. Technically, the recipient should say nothing and should certainly not express gratitude, for that would subvert the process by making it profane rather than sacred.

The situation is very much two-way, with the emphasis, however, on the "giving" (*dāna*) rather than the receiving. Furthermore, witnessing workaday examples of Śvetāmbar monks' begging suggests that the activity is not greatly formalized. The monk turns up at the entrance to a Śvetāmbar household with alms bowls, small portions of food are placed into them and are briefly inspected. The monk then takes the food back to the monastic lodgings to be consumed by his fellows.<sup>75</sup>

The Digambar practice of giving and receiving (*āhāradāna*) is, even in the present day, formal and ritualized.<sup>76</sup> One can get evidence on

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<sup>73</sup> Lalwani 1973: 59.

<sup>74</sup> Cort 1999: 96.

<sup>75</sup> Dundas 1997.

<sup>76</sup> Carrithers 1989: 227-28; Mahias 1989: 246-51; Shāntā 1985: 506-08.

posture and gesture, as well as nudity, in this context from photographs of Digambar practices.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, it is far from clear that the upturned hands into which the Digambar monk receives his food can be correctly described, or are ever in fact described, in terms of humility — even if, in terms of general body language, one cannot rule out such an interpretation. At all events, the monk's upturned hands still reflect need, for he lacks both bowl and food.

The nudity of the Digambar monk brings out some special points. Nakedness signifies, and reinforces, liberation from shame and sexual desire. It also emulates Mahāvīra. Though Jain texts occasionally recommend humility,<sup>78</sup> nudity is not, in practice at least, a mark of humility. The naked Digambar monk may exhibit aloofness towards the laity.<sup>79</sup> This aloofness is neither humility nor arrogance but a neutral or indifferent attitude born of the Digambar monk's confidence in his creed. The monk's nudity can signify renunciation of his socially constructed personality in the aim of spiritual development.<sup>80</sup> By going without clothes and practicing other renunciations, he removes some of the karmic dust on his soul.

Turn now to Christian mendicants. So far as actual begging is concerned, one finds precious few of these, and indeed only in the middle ages were they a prominent feature of Western Christianity.<sup>81</sup> Begging could involve humility, obedience to religious superiors, and setting aside shame — in a way that mutually reinforces all three. And in some medieval interpretations of the life and suffering of Christ, to engage in voluntary begging could be to imitate Christ. In addition, the Christian mendicant seeks understanding of self in relation to life and the supernatural.

<sup>77</sup> Fischer and Jain 1977: 70-77; Jain and Fischer 1978: Part One, Plates XX b), XXI b), XXII d), XXIII b), XXIV b), XXV a) and b), XXVII; Part Two, Plate XXXII c).

<sup>78</sup> For example, *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* 39.49, Jacobi 1884: vol. 2, 169.

<sup>79</sup> Carrithers 1989: 228.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Cort 1999: 89.

<sup>81</sup> Lawrence 1994.

A salient difference between Jainism and Christianity is that, for the latter, mendicancy in attitude alone, as distinct from actual begging, could involve and indeed partly constitute spiritual development. The Christian mendicant in attitude exhibits, for example, trust in God, acknowledgment of dependence on God and interdependence with other human beings, gratitude for the good things in life, and acceptance of the inconvenient, the disappointing, the painful. The Christian mendicant in attitude seeks purgation and purification through the redeeming power of Christ. He or she seeks, too, such understanding of God as is possible in this life, and likely hopes for some vision of God, face to face, in the life to come.<sup>82</sup>

Christian mendicants in attitude meditate and pray. They hope for a death in a state of grace. Just as the universal prayer of the Jains calls for "Death while in meditation,"<sup>83</sup> so the "Hail Mary" beseeches Mary the mother of Jesus to pray for sinners "now and at the hour of our death," and the "Anima Christi" asks of Jesus himself, "In the hour of my death call me, and bid me come to you." The Christian mendicant in attitude can also translate the Jain doctrine of nonharming into a principle that recommends nonviolence and the promotion of peace.

Within Christianity, an individual such as Michael the noble friar is undeniably a rare figure, but his nudity is worth pondering. His nakedness is not only striking because most climes, including Italy, are colder than the areas of India in which Digambar Jainism flourishes. It is also arresting because for the most part both religious and secular mores in the West require covering at least the genitals and the female breast. Yet Michael's nudity signals trust in and surrender to God, and reflects his willingness to disclose his entire self to God and others. Michael's way of expressing his radical faith invites controversy, just as the nudity of Digambar monks is controversial within Jainism.

Michael's story belongs to the Franciscan tradition, and Francis himself took off his clothes, including his breeches, at least twice:

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<sup>82</sup> Bynum 1995: 277-317.

<sup>83</sup> Jaini 1979: 226.

when he broke from his earthly father before the bishop of Assisi,<sup>84</sup> and just prior to his death.<sup>85</sup> On several other occasions he took off at least his tunic in repentance<sup>86</sup> or out of a desire to help others who lacked clothing.<sup>87</sup> Once Francis reprimanded a friar who had slighted a poor man, and ordered the friar to “take off your tunic and go naked before that poor man. . . and ask him to pray for you that God may pardon you.”<sup>88</sup>

It makes little sense to focus on the mendicant without bestowing appropriate attention on the almsgiver. In Jainism, the giver of alms obtains spiritual merit from giving food and other assistance to monks and nuns. The practitioner of *dāna* thus contributes to his or her spiritual development in this life and in future lives.

In Christianity, the almsgiver also gets spiritual merit — although what merit has to do with salvation is controversial. Paul reports Jesus as saying, “It is better to give than to receive.”<sup>89</sup> Elsewhere Paul himself allows for the giving and receiving of alms, and sometimes views the giving as a matter of good will rather than obligation.<sup>90</sup> The exchange breaks down somewhat differently in regard to religious and secular mendicants.

Aquinas comes close to saying that laypersons ought to give to mendicant friars, though for polemical purposes he was more concerned to defend religious begging than to establish a duty to give. Aquinas invokes a sort of division of labor in interpreting 2 Corinthians 8:14. “‘Let your abundance’, that is, in temporal things, ‘supply their want’, of the same things, ‘that their abundance’, that is, in spiritual goods, ‘also may supply your want’.”<sup>91</sup> Elsewhere he notes that

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<sup>84</sup> 1 Celano c. 15, Habig 1991: 241.

<sup>85</sup> 2 Celano cc. 214-15, Habig 1991: 533-34; Brooke 1990: 294-97.

<sup>86</sup> Brooke 1990: 156-59.

<sup>87</sup> Brooke 1990: 182-83; cf. 184-85.

<sup>88</sup> Brooke 1990: 240-41.

<sup>89</sup> Acts 20:35.

<sup>90</sup> 2 Cor. 9:7.

<sup>91</sup> Aquinas 1975: bk. III, ch. 135, ¶ 16 (p. 186).

the soldier, vinedresser, and herdsman of 1 Corinthians 9:7 “live by the fruit of their toil. Therefore, as . . . all preachers . . . labour to announce the Gospel, they have a right to accept the means of subsistence from those among whom they labour.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, Aquinas believes that although giving is generally better than receiving, sometimes the opposite is true. “Thus, a man, who, for the love of Christ, has made himself voluntarily poor, and accepts alms, is more blessed than the rich man who bestows the gift.”<sup>93</sup> Those who make themselves poor for Christ accept alms humbly, and “humility is a greater virtue than liberality.”<sup>94</sup> All the same, it is clear that the almsgiver makes spiritual progress in developing and practicing the virtue of liberality.

A key difference between Jain and Christian almsgiving is that only the latter appears to assign spiritual merit to assisting the beggar who is poor other than by choice. “Give to everyone who asks you,” says Jesus in Luke 6:30. Elsewhere Luke’s gospel emphasizes the danger in riches and the importance of giving alms to others.<sup>95</sup> The gospel of Matthew stresses a particular interior dimension: give alms in secret, rather than trumpet your generosity before others; God sees everything and will reward appropriately.<sup>96</sup> These aspects of the gospel message resonate with the epistle of James, which simultaneously shows concern for the poor and decries a faith that does not issue in good works.<sup>97</sup>

## VI. *Triadic Bonds*

Three-way relationships among mendicants, almsgivers, and a supernatural/superhuman being or beings make up a final important category in both Jainism and Christianity. Evidently a two-place relation exists between mendicant and almsgiver. Yet it is also the case, in some religions, that both mendicant and almsgiver stand in relation to the su-

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<sup>92</sup> Aquinas 1864: 40; 1902: 216.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas 1864: 44; 1902: 231.

<sup>94</sup> Aquinas 1864: 44; 1902: 233.

<sup>95</sup> Luke 3:11, 7:5, 12:33-34, 16:9, 18:22, 19:8.

<sup>96</sup> Matt. 6:1-4.

<sup>97</sup> For example, James 2:14-17.

pernatural, and that the bond between mendicant and almsgiver exists *because* each is connected to the supernatural.

In Jainism, the mendicant draws inspiration from the Jinas. The laity, too, are guided in their conception of right action, including appropriate almsgiving, as derived from teachings ascribed to the Jinas. So both mendicant and almsgiver take their cues from the Jinas. Furthermore, the bond of charity (*dāna*) between mendicant and almsgiver is strong because each individual at the end of the bond has a connection to the Jinas. The bond has, of course, social dimensions. Digambar *munis* interact with and depend on the laity — and vice versa.<sup>98</sup> Among Śvetāmbar, Mūrtipūjak mendicants are intertwined with Jain laypeople,<sup>99</sup> as are Terpanth ascetics.<sup>100</sup> Appropriate almsgiving is key to an ideal Jain lay life and to the Jain layman's reputation.<sup>101</sup> At present the historical record of the Śvetāmbar and Digambar traditions has not been studied sufficiently to say with confidence how much the triadic bonds among mendicants, laypeople, and Jinas have changed over time.

It may be argued that in Jainism the bonds are only dyadic on the ground that religious begging and almsgiving take place in the light, not of a Jina, but of an ineluctable process of birth, death, rebirth, and liberation. Babb's central thesis is that the Jinas are absent — indifferent to and unreachable by acts of worship (*pūjā*).<sup>102</sup> Carrithers sees Jainism as distinctive in its stress on the "inescapable self-reliance of souls and self-mortification as the fundamental spiritual action." This stress, he believes, is incompatible with the practice of *pūjā* for two reasons. First, *pūjā* rests on a relationship, which is inconsistent with thoroughgoing self-reliance. Second, as a form of spiritual action, *pūjā* consists of obeisance and offerings, "whereas Jain asceticism is

<sup>98</sup> Carrithers 1989: 226-30.

<sup>99</sup> Babb 1994; Cort 1991b.

<sup>100</sup> Flügel 1995-96.

<sup>101</sup> Cort 1991a: 406-10.

<sup>102</sup> Babb 1996.

another style, concentrating upon such self-referring, self-mortifying acts as fasting.”<sup>103</sup>

To evaluate the force of this argument, it is essential to distinguish, albeit somewhat crudely and artificially, between what might be called elevated and standard Jainism. Elevated Jainism encompasses the beliefs of the most literate and religiously best educated Jains. Carrithers’ “Mr. Y,” a considerable Jain scholar, is an exemplar of elevated Jainism. Mr. Y does not believe that the Jinas respond to acts of *pūjā*. The Jinas attained *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* through prodigious self-discipline and self-mortification. No connection exists between their exalted state and the “vale of suffering” in which earthly humans dwell.<sup>104</sup>

Standard Jainism, whether Digambar or Śvetāmbar, involves many acts of worship and homage (*pūjā*), charity (*dāna*), and giving up or renunciation (*tyāga*). For these acts the Jinas function not only as exemplars but also as individuals from whom Jains may seek guidance. Unlearned Jains, especially women, train their spiritual efforts on *pūjā*. Even the most learned Jains, who are often laymen, practice *pūjā*, though in their scholarly moments they may view acts of ritual as suspect. Thus the same individual can exemplify, at different times, both elevated and standard Jainism. Babb records many varieties of *pūjā*.<sup>105</sup> Carrithers reports: “Many Jains visit the local temple daily for a casual act of *pūjā*, and as they grow older some Jains — especially but not exclusively women — undertake more and more elaborate acts of *pūjā*.” Acts of “*pūjā* can be directed to each [of the twenty-four Jinas or ford-makers] in turn.” At the Jain temple “people would talk... of which ford-maker was their favourite. . . . The *munis* and ford-makers seemed very much part of the social landscape.”<sup>106</sup> Hence, even such scholars as Babb and Carrithers, who interpret the Jinas as doctrinally absent and inaccessible, provide evidence that many practicing Jains do not seem to regard them in that way.

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<sup>103</sup> Carrithers n.d.: 11.

<sup>104</sup> Carrithers n.d.: 10, 11.

<sup>105</sup> Babb 1996.

<sup>106</sup> Carrithers n.d.: 11, 12, 19.

One should therefore be alert to diverse understandings of *pūjā*. The insightful study of Humphrey and Laidlaw observes that responses to *pūjā* range from thoroughgoing rejection to devoted participation.<sup>107</sup> They confront the frequent Jain insistence that *pūjā* is “meaningless.” Sometimes this insistence stresses that the Jinās are beyond the pale of human affairs.<sup>108</sup> But often the Jains who say that *pūjā* is meaningless are pressing other positions — for example, that *pūjā* imitates Hindu practices, that it is at bottom a meditative or contemplative act, that it gains religious merit, that the superior form of religion is to avoid ritual (“to sacrifice sacrifice”), or that *pūjā* is an acknowledgment of the Jain creed.<sup>109</sup> The extensive discussion in Humphrey and Laidlaw brings out, too, that *pūjā* is addressed to the Jinās, who offer the prospect of salvation to all souls.<sup>110</sup> The form of *pūjā* known as *caitya vandan* is a rite of obeisance or veneration directed to the Jinās.<sup>111</sup> As much is evident in the *namaskar-mantra*, which begins *namō arihantānam* (“I bow before the Tīrthankars”).<sup>112</sup>

According to the “elevated” Jain view, the surviving relation is dyadic — between mendicant and almsgiver. Even so, acts of giving are seen as normative and are witnessable by a collectivity of fellows. Those who exemplify standard Jainism, as characterized here, are more numerous, and for them the relations among mendicants, almsgivers, and Jinās are indeed triadic. Thus in most everyday Jain practice Jinās, though neither physically present nor immediately accessible, are not wholly remote. They function as exemplars and preceptors. Their lives created an enduring metaphysical welfare (*kalyāṇa*) that appropriate rituals can call forth even today.<sup>113</sup> There is, then, considerable justification for speaking of triadic bonds in Jainism as it is usually

<sup>107</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 16; but cf. Flügel 1998.

<sup>108</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 2, 43; Jaini 1979: 193-94.

<sup>109</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 38, 43-45; Williams 1963: 185-86.

<sup>110</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 17.

<sup>111</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 28, 39.

<sup>112</sup> Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994: 26, 60; Bhattacharyya 1964.

<sup>113</sup> Babb 1996: 6, 27, 44, 135.

practiced. And even in elevated Jainism it is possible to speak of a triadic structure if one sees the third term as the cosmic order that makes it possible for ultimate liberation to be achieved.

In Christianity, triadic bonds were once stronger than they are now as regards actual begging. In the high middle ages, the mendicant friar begged in supposed imitation of Christ. The poor begged in trust and hope that God, through others, would aid them. At the same time, those who responded to these pleas for aid drew their justification from the gospels and from the traditions of the church. Thus mendicants religious and secular, along with the almsgivers to each, acted in a way they considered prescribed, or at least strongly encouraged, by God. And it was because God was understood to bless both the begging and the giving that a bond existed between mendicant and almsgiver. Indeed each had something to offer. The almsgiver offered material aid and, in turn, received spiritual benefits from the mendicant friar and a blessing from the poor beggar.

These three-way relations deteriorated, as regards mendicancy in practice, as the Western Church splintered and social change occurred. The history of this deterioration involves the transformation of medieval Catholic forms of charity into Reformation and Counter-Reformation forms and then into early modern charitable institutions.<sup>114</sup> The transformation of actual begging went hand in hand with changed attitudes to poverty, work, and wealth.

Nevertheless, Christian mendicancy in attitude, as distinguished from actual begging for either religious or secular reasons, requires somewhat different treatment. Standing alongside the mendicant in attitude is a figure who might be styled the almsgiver in attitude. The latter is at the ready to support those who have fallen away from humility and a hopeful trust in God's providence. The almsgiver in attitude is also prepared to aid those who cannot easily accept the difficulties and disappointments of life and to give new joy to those who have fallen prey to spiritual sadness.

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<sup>114</sup> Bossy 1985: 140-52.

The ideals of mendicancy in attitude and almsgiving in attitude are open to Christians at all times and in all places. Both draw their justification from a perception of the will of God. The former attitudinal ideal is mendicant because it renders those who follow it beggars of God. The latter attitudinal ideal takes on the character of an almoner because it is everywhere disposed to give spiritual as well as material aid when needed. Though the ideals remain conceptually distinct, an individual Christian can pursue both simultaneously.

Yet insofar as one can be both mendicant in attitude and almsgiver in attitude at the same time, the relation between the two collapses to the extent that the relata are persons. So understood, these conceptually distinct ideals can be adopted by all Christians at once, and generate a transformed set of polyadic relations that some will call the church and others the communion of saints.

## VII. *Conclusion*

Contrary to first and even some later impressions, Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving shed light on each other. They do so *because* of three general categories under which these practices fall. One is heroism in begging: a complex of dispositions, qualities, and actions that move the mendicant to transcend the reality of everyday life. Another is the spiritual development that stems from the seeking and giving of alms, even though the nature of this development differs markedly in Jainism and Christianity. The last is the triadic nature of religious mendicancy. The practice involves mendicant, almsgiver, and a supernatural being (God) or superhuman beings (Jinas) who have three-way relations to one another.

One can now see more clearly and deeply why this inquiry commands interest. For at least two reasons scholars of comparative religion, students of spirituality, philosophers of religion, and others should care whether it is possible to compare Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving.

In the first place, the categories used to examine Jain and Christian practices reveal an underlying structure that might be used to analyze other varieties of religious mendicancy and almsgiving. The cate-

gories are heroism, spiritual development, and triadic bonds. *Prima facie* they hold promise for investigating mendicancy and almsgiving in Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. To the objection that these categories are suspiciously general I respond that their generality is precisely what makes them potentially useful in the case of other religions. Investigating Buddhist and Hindu practices of mendicancy and almsgiving is well beyond the scope of this article. But plainly the Jain-Christian comparison is a pertinent test case for such investigations. I make no claim that using these three categories *must* or *will* succeed elsewhere. If they do not, the failure could itself be instructive. For instance, should there be a religion in which voluntary begging is not heroic, that fact might point to other differences between that religion on the one hand and Jainism and Christianity on the other. Again, should the practice of mendicancy in a religion turn out to be disconnected from spiritual development, that fact may illuminate whether there the practice of voluntary begging has degenerated into aimless abasement, or whether that religion differs in some structural respect from Jainism and Christianity.

Secondly, demonstrating similarities between Jainism and Christianity provides empirical evidence that even quite different cultures are not so self-contained that it is impossible to compare them. The similarities undermine one sort of relativism in anthropology: the position that cultural differences in religious beliefs and practices generate religious disagreements that are so fundamental as to be beyond transcultural religious understanding. If the argument of this essay is sound, a thick description of religious understanding makes possible a deep comparison of Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving and thereby subverts the sort of relativism just defined.<sup>115</sup>

This article is an initial effort to analyze similarities and differences between Jain and Christian mendicancy and almsgiving. Scholars of Jainism have the training and ability to improve on the discussion of particular cases, just as Christian theologians and historians can further illuminate religious mendicancy in the medieval West. Yet this study

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. Moody-Adams 1997.

will have achieved its purpose if it provides an intellectual framework that facilitates more detailed scholarly work.

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# ÜBER DIE URSACHEN DES SIEGES DES CHRISTENTUMS IN ÄGYPTEN

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*Dem Andenken von Siegfried Morenz,  
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Die Kultur ist Ausdrucksform der Religion, und die Religion ist Inhalt der Kultur.  
Die Einheit von Religion und Kultur als Einheit von unbedingtem Sinn-Gehalt  
und bedingter Sinn-Form ist das wesensmäßige Verhältnis beider.

Paul Tillich<sup>2</sup>

## *Summary*

One hundred and eighty years of egyptological scholarship has failed to establish why and how the ancient Egyptian religion could be surmounted by Christianity. In recent decades scholars have attributed Christianity's triumph to Christian revelation, the moral superiority of Christianity, its more thoroughly social sensibility, monotheism, its domination over the *heimarmene*, etc. The riddle is intensified if we consider that by the time of the decay of the autochthonous Egyptian religion in the home country, the so-called Isis religion was victorious in other provinces of the *Imperium Romanum*. The present paper argues that the two religions represent two different types, the Egyptian one being an ethnic religion, Christianity being a universal one. Consequently, the Egyptian religion had no need of *soteria*, while Christianity was born in a situation of "*Unheil*". During the last millennium of the pharaonic history the crisis of the traditional religion became more and more serious, because the cleft between cult and the native culture supporting this cult became too deep. This conclusion is supported by the decline of the hieroglyphic and demotic scripture, the disappearing of the characteristic Egyptian art and the profound change in the anthropological

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<sup>1</sup> Aus dem Vorwort seines Werkes *Gott und Mensch im alten Ägypten*, Leipzig, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> *Religionsphilosophie*, 2. Aufl., Stuttgart, 1969, S. 60-61.

understanding of human being, which might have required the soteriology of a new religion.

Die altägyptische Religion (zumindest ihre Spätform in der Römerzeit) und das sich herausbildende Christentum haben schon im zweiten Jahrhundert nach Christus, wie man auf exakte Weise beweisen kann, in Ägypten nebeneinander existiert. Insbesondere jene zwei bis drei Jahrhunderte, welche noch bis zum Triumph des Christentums vergingen, bildeten die Zeit der Wahl der Religion. Dem *Individuum* bot sich eine Möglichkeit, bei der die Wahl sogar zur existentiellen Notwendigkeit wurde: In welcher Religion soll ich leben? Dem mag die zweite Frage, diejenige nach dem Warum gefolgt sein.

In den anderthalb Jahrhunderten der Ägyptologie sind mehrere ausgezeichnete religionswissenschaftliche Arbeiten entstanden. Sie tragen zumeist phänomenologischen Charakter. Es gibt auch gute Geschichtsabrisse der Römerzeit.<sup>3</sup> Was es jedoch noch nicht gibt, das ist eine ägyptische Religionsgeschichte, welche meiner Ansicht nach den historischen Werdegang der ägyptischen Religion einschließlich ihres Endes beschreiben sollte und auch versuchen müßte, auf die oben angeführten Fragen nach dem (historischen und existentiellen) *Warum* eine Antwort zu geben.

Das Endergebnis des Kampfes der beiden Religionen kennen wir heute schon aus der Geschichte. Wir wissen aber nicht, warum der oberägyptische Fellache Christ wurde, was den Priester des berühmten Tempels in Philae motiviert hat und wie der memphitische Theologe

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<sup>3</sup> So z.B. Alan K. Bowman, *Egypt after the Pharaohs, 332 BC-AD 642 from Alexander to the Arab Conquest*, California University Press 1989, der die von uns gestellte Frage nicht einmal aufwirft; L. Kákosy, Probleme der Religion im römischen Ägypten, in: ANRW II. 18,5, S. 2894-3049. Die neueste Monographie von David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt. Assimilation and Resistance*, Princeton, 1998 betont vielmehr die Kontinuität der alten Religion mit dem Christentum, so daß sie manchmal den Eindruck erweckt, daß außer den streitsüchtigen Mönchen die Mehrheit der Ägypter den sanften Religionswechsel kaum wahrnehmen konnte.

mit der uralten Tradition seine eigene Situation einschätzte. Ich bin mir darüber im Klaren, daß auch dann die Beantwortung des *Warum* problematisch wäre, wenn mir heute ein damaliger Ägypter begegnen und es nicht den Abstand von anderthalb Jahrtausenden geben würde. (Was also das Verstehen erschwert, ist grundlegend nicht die zeitliche Entfernung, sondern — um das Fazit vorwegzunehmen — die kulturelle.) Deshalb ist mein Beitrag nur ein Versuch. Die Beantwortung der Frage wird auch dadurch erschwert, daß die wenigen, die bisher die Frage nach dem Warum dieser weltanschaulichen Entscheidung zu beantworten versuchten, selbst aus dem siegreichen christlichen Kulturkreis kamen, möglicherweise waren sie bekennende Christen, und waren dadurch in ihrer Erklärung beeinflusst.

#### *Versuche*

Eine der mir bekannten Antworten ist ausgesprochen dogmatisch: „...die innere Wahrheit des Christentums bot jene innere Würde, Aufrichtigkeit, Festigkeit, Ernsthaftigkeit und Kraft, welche wir bei ihren Konkurrenten vergeblich suchen“ (Newman). Dieses aus historischer Sicht unreflektierte, idealisierte Bild wird den Religionshistoriker kaum befriedigen. Eine weitere mögliche Erklärung wäre jene Auffassung des Vulgärmarxismus, derzufolge zu den immer höher entwickelten Gesellschaftsformationen die ihnen entsprechenden ebenfalls immer höher entwickelten Religionen hinzutreten. Diese Ansicht geht möglicherweise auf die — an und für sich viel differenziertere — Studie „Bruno Bauer und das Urchristentum“ von Friedrich Engels zurück. Eine dritte Ansicht vertritt der Religionshistoriker und Theologe Johannes Leipoldt,<sup>4</sup> der meint, daß bei den missionarischen Erfolgen der antiken Religionen deren ethisches Niveau die entscheidende Rolle gespielt hat. Auf oberster Stufe stünde das Christentum, gefolgt vom Judentum, dann käme die Isisreligion, auf einer noch niedrigeren Stufe stünden die griechischen Mysterienreligionen und

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<sup>4</sup> Der Sieg des Christentums über die Religionen der alten Welt, in: Johannes Leipoldt, Von den Mysterien zur Kirche, Leipzig 1961, S. 163-196; besonders S. 180 und S. 192.

der Mithraskult, dann kämen die Phrygier usw. Den Gedanken der ethischen Rangordnung kann man bis Augustin (*De civitate* II. 13) zurückverfolgen.

Da alle drei Herangehensweisen auf ein Evolutionsdogma bauen, das auf die Welt der Religionen nicht paßt und nur Mißverständnisse erzeugt,<sup>5</sup> versuche ich in eine andere Richtung zu gehen. Bekannt ist auch eine Antwort, derzufolge das für soziale Fragen viel aufgeschlosseneres Christentum die dafür wesentlich weniger sensiblen antiken Religionen besiegt hätte. Diese These gibt es auch in einer anderen Formulierung: Die sozial schwächeren Schichten (untere Klassen, Proletarier, sozial nicht Integrierte, Rechtlose entsprechend der jeweiligen Terminologie) wären für das Evangelium des Christentums empfänglicher gewesen als die Elite.<sup>6</sup> Dieses marxistisch geprägte Herangehen bleibt auch in ihrer modernsten Form eine charakteristische Theorie aus dem 19. Jahrhundert. Sie reduziert die Religion auf eine caritative gesellschaftliche Institution, als ob solch grundlegende, voneinander auch fern stehende Faktoren wie das religiöse Erlebnis, der Mythos, der Kult, die Anthropologie, die Eschatologie, Soteriologie, Dogmatik usw. überhaupt keine Funktion hätten. Diese Hypothese wird auch von den historischen Tatsachen nicht gestützt<sup>7</sup> und bleibt

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<sup>5</sup> Gustav Mensching, *Die Religion. Erscheinungsformen, Strukturtypen und Lebensgesetze*, München, o. J., S. 266-288.

<sup>6</sup> Zuletzt bei Henry A. Green, *The socio-economic background of Christianity in Egypt*, in: B.A. Pearson — J.E. Goehring (Hrsg.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, Philadelphia, 1986, S. 100-113.

<sup>7</sup> Aus dem Ägypten des 1. Jahrhunderts kennen wir nur einen einzigen Christen. Er heißt Apollos (*Acta* 18,24 f.), über seinen sozialen Status wissen wir nichts (C.W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity*, Leiden, 1991, S. 16-17). Wenn wir uns schon bei den sozialen Tatsachen aufhalten, dann suggeriert uns das mit wenig Angaben dienende zweite und das reicheres Quellenmaterial liefernde dritte Jahrhundert, daß die Christen wenigstens aus dem Mittelstand hervorgingen. Grundbedingung war das Verstehen der griechischen LXX. Dies kann man nur bei den auf einer höheren Stufe stehenden Alexandrinern bzw. bei griechischen Siedlern und gebildeten ägyptischen Priestern voraussetzen wie später bei den Hora-Missionaren die Kenntnis beider Sprachen. Der relativ späte Antonius verkauft ja gerade seine *Güter*. Eben durch ihre Vermittlung gelangte das Evangelium zu den unteren Klassen.

gleichzeitig eine Antwort auf die Frage schuldig, warum die sozial am Rande Stehenden nicht in ihren traditionellen (und deshalb auch sozial erhaltenden) Religionen verblieben sind und in deren eigenem Rahmen caritative Hilfsorganisationen geschaffen haben, wobei ihnen Verfolgungen erspart geblieben wären. Auch bleibt jene Frage unbeantwortet, warum die Elite, wenn auch mit einiger Verspätung, die Religion des Proletariats, das Christentum angenommen hat.

Bemerkenswerterweise sind die neuesten Versuche auch *gesellschaftswissenschaftlich* orientiert. Einer der renommiertesten Forscher der behandelten Zeit, R.S. Bagnall,<sup>8</sup> beschreibt, wie die Tempel aufgrund mangelnder staatlicher Unterstützung zugrundegegangen und verlassen worden sind, bezweifelt jedoch, daß die Ägypter den alten Glauben verloren hätten. Seiner Meinung nach haben sie die institutionelle Basis der Religion verloren und auf diese Weise sei der Kult als organisierendes Prinzip der Gesellschaft verschwunden. Die ansonsten tiefgründige Studie hat mich an diesem Punkt nicht überzeugt, weil die Geschichte uns m. E. oft etwas Anderes lehrt. Verkürzung des Kultes bedeutet zwar eine große Herausforderung für eine Religion, jedoch nicht unbedingt ihren Untergang. Sie kann sogar als Stimulus für eine — „nicht-priesterliche“ — religiöse Erweckung dienen.<sup>9</sup> Der amerikanische Religionssoziologe Rodney Stark,<sup>10</sup> der auf eine sehr interessante Weise versucht, das Christentum des 2. und 3. Jahrhunderts zahlenmäßig zu beschreiben, plädiert für einige soziologische Fakten, welche den Aufstieg des Christentums wesentlich beeinflusst

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<sup>8</sup> Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, Princeton 1993, S. 268

<sup>9</sup> Ähnliches wurde z.B. von den ungarischen Protestanten im 17-18. Jh. erfahren, als die starke Rekatholisierung mit Staatsgewalt unterstützt, die Kultausübung unmöglich gemacht und die Prediger sogar auf die Galeeren verschleppt wurden. Aber auch die Zerstörung des zweiten Tempels zu Jerusalem, die Schließung des Tempels von Onias, die Vertreibung und Ausrottung der ägyptischen Juden haben nicht zum Untergang, sondern zu einer religiösen Erneuerung und zur Geburt des rabbinischen Judentums geführt.

<sup>10</sup> *The Rise of Christianity. A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, Princeton, 1996. Der Aufstieg des Christentums. Neue Erkenntnisse aus soziologischer Sicht, Weinheim, 1997.

haben mögen wie z.B. höhere Fertilitätsraten bei Christen, Verbot von Abtreibung und Kindstötung, eine große Anzahl exogamer Heiraten, eine niedrigere Sterblichkeit der Christen während der Epidemien, usw. Naturerscheinungen und Infektionen werden jedoch nur sehr begrenzt von der Glaubenszugehörigkeit beeinflusst. Leider lassen sich auch die anderen faszinierenden Hypothesen anhand der historischen Quellen nicht beweisen. Die Quellen müssen nämlich *lege artis* ausgewertet werden. Beispielsweise dürfen auf ihre Opponenten bezogene Behauptungen christlicher Polemiker in ihren apologetischen Schriften nur mit äußerster Behutsamkeit interpretiert werden.

Manche Forscher heben im Zusammenhang mit unserer eingangs gestellten Frage den monotheistischen Charakter des Christentums heraus und stellen diesen dem Polytheismus der ägyptischen Religion gegenüber. Dieses Herangehen halte ich aus zwei Gründen nicht für adäquat: Einerseits besaß (historisch gesehen) ein ägyptischer Fellahe, dessen Vorfahren drei Jahrtausende lang mit ihren Göttern sehr gut zurechtkamen, keine Ambition zum Monotheismus (der Monotheismus brachte ja eigene, zuvor unbekannte oder schwer lösbare Probleme wie z.B. das verstärkte Auftreten der Frage der Theodizee mit sich). Andererseits glaube ich (aus religionsphilosophischer Sicht), daß die Frage des Monotheismus-Polytheismus im allgemeinen mißverstanden wird, nämlich meistens als eine mathematisch-numerische Frage.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> An dieser Stelle möchte ich weder auf die Frage der Trinität noch auf die  $1 = 3$  Zahlenmystik eingehen, sondern verweise auf eine wesentliche Erkenntnis in der "These" des Artikels "The transition of the Christian faith from the New Testament-Jewish context to the Nicene-Hellenistic context" von Ellen Flessemann-van Leer, in: Michael Kinnamon (Hrsg.), *Towards Visible Unity*, Vol. II., WCC Geneva, 1982, S. 105. Dort heißt es: "The biblical conviction that there is only one God is not identical with the philosophical concept of monotheism. . . When second Isaiah calls the other gods „nothingnesses", he had not primarily in mind their non-existence . . . , but rather the fact that they cannot do anything or help anyone. Therefore, the non-biblical term *monarchia* of the early fathers is much closer to the Bible than the term monotheism." Was den Polytheismus betrifft, so vergegenwärtigt er die Möglichkeiten verschiedener Manifestationen des Heiligen in der Welt (was auch

Natürlich hat die Frage der Bekehrung, d.h. der Wechsel des Einzelnen oder der Sozietät von der früheren religiösen Tradition zu einer anderen eine enorme Vielfalt von wissenschaftlichen Reflexionen hervorgerufen, und man könnte zum Beispiel sagen, daß dies regelmäßig nach einer Identitätskrise auftritt, oder daß diejenigen, die einen labilen Status ohne eine haltbietende gesellschaftliche (parentale) Bindung innehaben, betroffen werden können.<sup>12</sup> Die Bekehrung kann von der früheren sozialen Isolation oft in die Richtung der Integration in die Majorität hinführen (dies mag suspekt erscheinen), in anderen Fällen aber auch zur Minorität (die den Eindruck echter Religiosität weckt). Wenn diese religionspsychologischen und religionssoziologischen Beobachtungen im Falle Ägyptens auch zutreffen mögen und sich auch historisch auswerten lassen, bleiben sie dennoch Tatbestandsaufnahmen einer *deskriptiven* Wissenschaft und keine Erklärungen auf die Frage des Warum der Bewegung und der Richtung dieser Bewegung.

Einen anderen Gesichtspunkt betont H. te Velde in seiner Abschiedsrede über das Ende der altägyptischen religiösen Tradition,<sup>13</sup> indem er auf die strukturelle Verwandtschaft zwischen dem Pharaon und Jesus Christus verweist. Beide besitzen nämlich eine Zentralstellung in der jeweiligen Religion, ohne ihre Personen wären der „Pharaonismus“, d.h. die altägyptische Religion, bzw. das Christentum undenkbar gewesen. Die unheilbare Wunde der alten Religion sei durch die Abwesenheit der römischen Kaiser von Ägypten und besonders durch ihre Bekehrung zum Christentum, d. h. eine feindliche Gesinnung gegenüber den Göttern, verursacht worden. Ich bin zwar auch

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von den Gläubigen der monotheistischen Religionen erfahren, aber anders formuliert wird) und er steht in keiner Beziehung zur Zahlenmäßigkeit. Für die Frage, inwieweit der durch die Wissenschaftlichkeit der christlichen Welt geschaffene Monotheismus-Begriff die Struktur einer Religion adäquat beschreiben kann, wäre es aufschlußreich zu untersuchen, was die beiden anderen monotheistischen Religionen, das Judentum und der Islam, vom Christentum halten.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, *The psychology of religious behaviour, belief and experience*, London — New York, 1997, S. 114-123.

<sup>13</sup> Het einde van de oudegyptische religieuze traditie, Groningen, 1997.

überzeugt, daß sich diese Erschütterung ziemlich ungünstig für die ägyptische Religion auswirkte, glaube jedoch nicht, daß dies zu einem grundlegenden Wandel ausreichte, da nämlich die Möglichkeit theologischer Substitutionen des Königs weiterhin bestand.<sup>14</sup> Außerdem war die Realpräsenz der strukturell entsprechenden Zentralfigur des konkurrierenden Christentums, Jesus Christus, auch nicht materiell greifbar.

Vielleicht kommen wir dem Verständnis der Frage näher, wenn wir die im Mittelmeerraum als Konkurrenten des Christentums auftretenden Religionen betrachten. Renan schrieb noch: „Man kann sagen, daß, wenn eine tödliche Krankheit das Christentum in seinem Wachstum aufgehalten hätte, die Welt mithraistisch geworden wäre“.<sup>15</sup> Wenn gleich die Forschung Vidmans der These Renans widerspricht, weil sie überzeugend nachweist, daß im dritten und vierten Jahrhundert nach Christus Isis und Sarapis populärer waren als Mithras,<sup>16</sup> bleibt dennoch seine Fragestellung bestehen. Den Erfolg jener Götter erklärt die bisherige Forschung vor allem damit, daß sie im Gegensatz zu den griechischen und römischen Göttern über der *heimarmene* standen und die Gottheit dem einzelnen Menschen als *soter* nahekam.

Viele und mannigfache Leiden hast du überstanden und von großen Unwettern und mächtigen Stürmen des Schicksals bist du umhergetrieben worden, um nun endlich zum Hafen der Ruhe und zum Altare der Barmherzigkeit zu kommen, Lucius. Deine Herkunft und selbst deine Stellung oder die Bildung, durch die du dich auszeichnest, hat dir nicht irgendwo genützt . . . Denn bei denen, deren Leben unsere erhabene Göttin zu ihrem Dienst erkoren, hat der feindliche Zufall keine Stätte. (Apuleius, Metamorphosen IX. 15).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> H. te Velde verweist auf die „heilsgeschichtliche“ Fiktion bei der Datierung nach den Regierungsjahren Diokletians, auch 36 Jahre nach dem Tode des Kaisers.

<sup>15</sup> “On peut dire que, si le christianisme eût été arrêté dans sa croissance par quelque maladie mortelle, le monde eût été mithraïste.” Ernest Renan, *Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique*, Paris, 1882, S. 579.

<sup>16</sup> Isis, Mithras und das Christentum, in: J. Irmscher — K. Treu (Hrsg.), *Das Corpus der Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*, Berlin, 1977, S. 237-242.

<sup>17</sup> Apuleius, *Metamorphosen oder Der Goldene Esel*. Lateinisch und deutsch von Rudolf Helm, Berlin, 1956, S. 337.

Nun, die Geschichte zeigt, daß die Isis-Religion, die im dritten, vierten Jahrhundert dem Christentum in Europa eine ernsthafte Konkurrentin war, gleichzeitig jedoch in ihrer Heimat die Schlacht verlor. Deshalb können wir die obige Erklärung, daß Isis Herrin des Schicksals ist, nicht als ausreichend betrachten, denn einerseits erscheint auch Christus auf diese Weise,<sup>18</sup> andererseits verweist die Tatsache, daß Isis in diesem Kampf unterliegt, darauf, daß ihre Macht über die *heimarmene* nicht ausreichte, ihren Einfluß und ihre Macht zu erhalten.

*Warum verarmte die ägyptische Religion?*

Wir kehren zurück zu unserem Ausgangspunkt. Vielleicht könnten wir eine positive Antwort bekommen, wenn wir unsere Frage einfach umkehren. *Der Sieg des Christentums wurde geschichtlich dadurch ermöglicht*, — ich spreche hier nicht von einem kausalen, sondern von einem zeitlichen Verhältnis, nicht von der immanenten Notwendigkeit, daß das Christentum siegen *mußte*, sondern von einem *geschichtlichen* Nacheinander der Ereignisse — *daß die innere Verarmung der alten ägyptischen Religion nach einer mehr als tausendjährigen Krisenperiode eine solche Stufe erreicht hatte, daß sie einfach nach der Auffüllung eines existentiellen Vakuums, nach einem Inhalt verlangte*. Infolgedessen werden wir nicht nach dem *proprium* des Christentums fragen, weil wir unser Thema nicht von der christlichen Dogmatik her angehen, sondern wir möchten die hauptsächlichen Veränderungstendenzen der ägyptischen Religion verstehen, denn diese haben dem Christentum den Boden bereitet.

In der Staatsreligion hatten die libyschen oder nubischen Pharaonen die zentral vermittelnde Aufgabe der ägyptischen Pharaonen noch auf natürliche Weise übernommen, aber schon nach der Renaissance der 26. Dynastie war dies viel problematischer. Kambyse erscheint als Mörder des Apis-Stieres und als Feind der ägyptischen Religion, was geschichtlich zwar nicht beweisbar, aber in der ägyptischen Tradition überliefert ist. Auch die Ptolemäer können (und wollen vielleicht auch)

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<sup>18</sup> Vgl. Röm 8,31-39 mit ähnlich hymnischer Diktion oder einen Ausschnitt aus dem Gebet des Apostels in Eph 1,19-22.

trotz ihrer Tempel errichtenden und mit der Priesterschaft einen Kompromiß suchenden Religionspolitik keine neue religiöse Blütezeit einleiten und einen ihrer Kultur fremden Kult künstlich erhalten. Demgegenüber hält unter Ptolemäus Soter, zumindest der Kultlegende zufolge,<sup>19</sup> Sarapis, der (von religionspolitischen Aspirationen begleitete) neue hellenistische Gott, Einzug. Dies aber ist schon offensichtlich das Anzeichen der Krise. Da blieb den alexandrinischen Gelehrten und den ausländischen Verehrern der Isis nur noch eine hoffnungslose Aufgabe: der Versuch, die tote Religion mit Hilfe einer neuplatonischen Allegorisierung zum Leben zu erwecken.

Das besonders Groteske folgt aber erst noch: Die Ägypten erobernden römischen Kaiser, die im Gegensatz zu ihren erobernden Vorgängern ihren Fuß nicht einmal ins Land setzen, seine Sprache nicht sprechen, nichts über seinen Glauben wissen und sogar die Isisreligion verfolgen — Tiberius beispielsweise verbietet nach dem Skandal um Paulina und Mundus in Rom die Isisverehrung und wirft die Statue der Göttin in den Tiber<sup>20</sup> — diese Kaiser also erscheinen als Pharaonen an den Tempelwänden im königlichen Ornat und bringen den ägyptischen Göttern ein Opfer. In den letzten Zeiten sind neben ihrer Person nur noch die leeren Kartuschen oder die Inschrift *pr ꜥ3* (=Pharao) zu finden. Im letzten halben Jahrhundert vor dem Toleranzedikt Konstantins des Großen sind hieroglyphische Königsnamen ziemlich selten. Einer der letzten römischen Kaiser, der noch mit seinem in Hieroglyphen geschriebenen Namen (an der Innenwand des Chnum-Tempels von Esna) erscheint, ist Decius. Darauf folgend finden wir noch die Namen Diokletians (284-305) und Maximians (286-305) auf einer im Grab der Buchis Stiere aufgefundenen Stele.<sup>21</sup> Es besitzt symbolischen Wert, daß der letzte in Ägypten hieroglyphisch bezeugte Kaiser Maximinus Daia (270-313) der heidnische Mitregent Konstantins war.<sup>22</sup> Das virtuelle Verschwinden der Zeichen der alten

<sup>19</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside* 28, Tacitus, *Hist.* IV. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Fl. Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 65-80.

<sup>21</sup> R. Mond — O. Myers, *The Bucheum II*, London, 1934, S. 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Verweis von Th. Schneider, *Lexikon der Pharaonen*, München, 1996, S. 231.

Kulte nach 324, noch vor den legislativen Repressalien, weist jedoch darauf hin, daß die Gesellschaft in dieser Zeit im Großen und Ganzen schon christlich war.<sup>23</sup>

Die Ursache der Verarmung der ägyptischen Religion ist aber nicht mit der Fremdherrschaft und der (auch nicht immer) ungünstigen Religionspolitik erklärbar. *Die innere Verarmung hat vielmehr innere Ursachen.* Wir können die Vermehrung der pantheistischen Götter beobachten und erachten dies als symptomatisch. Die in der Saitenzeit noch blühende Praxis der Amulette nimmt in der Römerzeit schon stark ab. Aus der Götterdreieit von Isis, Sarapis (bzw. Osiris) und Horus wird letzterer verdrängt, an seine Stelle tritt Anubis. Dies zeigt, daß die Person des Horus verblaßt, gleichzeitig aber die Bedeutung des Kindgottes Harpokrates, einer aus der Volksfrömmigkeit stammenden Form des Horus, wächst.<sup>24</sup> Dieselbe Frömmigkeitsrichtung wird auch von Bes, dem Zwergengott, repräsentiert. Unter den alten großen Göttern kann sich noch die Verehrung des Thot halten. Den Tierkult, der immer Zielscheibe des Spottes von Juvenal über Lukian bis hin zu den

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<sup>23</sup> R.S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, S. 281.

<sup>24</sup> Dies ist eine auffallende Parallele dazu, wie aus dem *Rex tremendae maiestatis* das Jesuskind wird. Vielleicht ist es auch kein Zufall, daß gerade im Bereich der Manifestation dieses religiösen Phänomens andere phänomenologische Ähnlichkeiten zwischen der ägyptischen Religion und dem Christentum bestehen. Unter diesen ist die zweifellos markanteste die Ähnlichkeit zwischen *Isis lactans* und *Maria lactans*. Zu Maria siehe S. Morenz, *Ägyptens Beitrag zur werdenden Kirche* (unveröffentlichte Habilitationsschrift), S. 131 ff.; R.E. Witt, *Isis in the Graeco-Roman World*, London, 1971, S. 269-281 ist gegebenenfalls mit Kritik zu lesen; M. Görg, *Mythos, Glaube und Geschichte. Die Bilder des christlichen Credo und ihre Wurzeln im alten Ägypten*, Düsseldorf, 1993, S. 108 ff., zur Darstellung siehe A. Effenberger, *Koptische Kunst*, Leipzig, 1975, S. 112; M. Krause, in: *Ägypten. Schätze aus dem Wüstensand. Kunst und Kultur der Christen am Nil* (Ausstellungskatalog Hamm), Wiesbaden, 1996, S. 24. Grundlegende monographische Behandlungen der Frage: V. Tran Tam Tinh, *Isis lactans*, Leiden 1973, EPRO 37; E. Stauffer, *Antike Madonnenreligion*, in: ANRW II. 17,3 Berlin — New York, 1984, S. 1426-1499. L. Langener, *Isis lactans — Maria lactans: Untersuchungen zur koptischen Ikonographie*, in: St. Emmer, M. Krause, etc. (Hrsgg.), *Aegypten und Nubien in späantiker und christlicher Zeit*, Bd. I. Wiesbaden, 1999, S. 223-229.

Kirchenvätern war, betrachten wir nicht als Zeichen des langsamen Verfalls, da dieser ägyptische Religiosität *sui generis* ist. Für ein Symptom des Verfalls jedoch halten wir dessen allegorisierende Apologie, denn die Allegorese<sup>25</sup> ist immer die äußere Erscheinung der inneren Zerrissenheit, ein Signal dessen, daß die alte Tradition — die man aber nicht verwerfen will — nicht mehr so akzeptiert werden kann wie früher. Wer die spekulative Ätiologie der späten Tempelinschriften liest und dabei an die Mahnungen der klassischen Epochen oder an die zu den Höhepunkten der religiösen Literatur gehörenden Werke der individuellen Frömmigkeit der Ramessidenzeit denkt, wird vermutlich diesen Verfall, diese Schrumpfung und Verengung bemerken. Was die hellenistisch gebildeten Sympathisanten der ägyptischen Religion in jener Zeit noch sehen, das sind die Einhaltung der strengen rituellen Regeln und die strengen ethischen Normen. Der Religionshistoriker aber weiß, daß eine starke Ethisierung jeglicher Religion das unverkennbare Merkmal des Abstiegs ist. Bestehen bleiben der Totenkult, der teilweise sogar noch in der koptischen Periode existiert, und die Magie als stärkstes Charakteristikum der spätesten ägyptischen Religiosität.

Summe des mageren Befundes ist: Die sich auf die neuplatonische Philosophie auflagernde und zur Magie schrumpfende ägyptische Religion mußte verlieren, weil erstere von den breiten Volksschichten nicht angenommen wurde und weil die Magie nur ein sehr schmales Segment der immer mit dem die Totalität umfassenden Anspruch auftretende Religion abdeckt. Die Begrenztheit jener, Zauberkräfte anwendenden Dämonen beschreibt Kelsos (VIII. 60.) auf gute Weise so, daß „... der größte Teil der irdischen Dämonen mit der Zeugung eng

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<sup>25</sup> Schon Xenophanes und Theagenes nehmen daran Anstoß, daß Homer die Götter zu menschlich schildert, wobei sie die homerischen Götter nicht an religiösen, sondern *moralischen* Prinzipien messen. Auch Platon, Staat II 377-378, möchte unmoralische Göttergeschichten bei Homer ausmerzen. Die Allegorie ist immer eine *sekundäre*, aktualisierende Auslegung eines religiösen Textes, die dadurch die frühe, d.h. *primitive* Deutung herabwürdigt und auch deren einstige, originale Gültigkeit anzweifelt. Zu Hintergrund und Geschichte bei den Griechen, Juden und Christen siehe J. Leipoldt — S. Morenz, Heilige Schriften, Leipzig 1953, S. 130-140.

zusammenhänge und an Blut und Fettdampf gebunden . . . sei und deshalb nicht Besseres ausrichten könne, als den Körper zu heilen und . . . ihr künftiges Geschick vorherzusagen.”<sup>26</sup>

Das kosmologische Interesse der Magie reicht nur bis zur Bedrohung der Gottheit und sie hat für die Eschatologie, und was noch wichtiger ist, für die Soteriologie keinerlei Sensibilität. Diese Unempfindlichkeit gegenüber der Transzendenz, dieser reine Pragmatismus kann auch in kürzerer Zeit eine Religion untergraben.

### *Zwei Typen von Religion*

S. Morenz<sup>27</sup> beschreibt die ägyptische Religion bei ihrer Typisierung als Kultreligion. Dieser Kult ist ein Staatskult, ihr Agent ist der Pharaon, der als Vermittler für den Staat, ja sogar für die Ordnung des Kosmos auftritt, jedoch nicht für das Heil<sup>28</sup> des Einzelnen.

Lange Zeit bedeutete dies kein Problem, da in die Stammes- und Volksreligionen und damit in den Heilszustand, in welchen man nicht hineingetauft werden kann, jedes Glied der Gemeinschaft hineingeboren wird. Aufgabe des Kultes ist in diesen Religionen die Aufrechterhaltung des kosmischen Gleichgewichts und die Abwehr der Gefahr des Hineinfallens in das alltägliche Chaos.<sup>29</sup>

Bei dem anderen Typ von Religion (wozu die Mysterienreligionen und das Christentum gehören) wird das Individuum in den Zustand des „Unheils“ geboren, und es muß individuell den Weg des Heils

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<sup>26</sup> Des Origenes acht Bücher gegen Celsus, II. Teil, Buch V-VIII, aus dem Griechischen übersetzt von P. Koetschau, München 1927 (Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, Band 53).

<sup>27</sup> Ägyptische Religion, Stuttgart, 1960, S. 244 ff.; Gott und Mensch im alten Ägypten, Leipzig, 1964, S. 19-28.

<sup>28</sup> Ich bin mir dessen bewußt, daß die meisten Lexika und Nachschlagewerke keine Definition für „Heil“ geben. Diesen Mangel bemerken wir umso empfindlicher, als dazu z.B. im Englischen gar kein adäquates Wort existiert. „Salvation“ kann sowohl Heil als auch Erlösung heißen, welche als Zustand bzw. Vorgang einander gegenseitig ausschließen.

<sup>29</sup> G. Mensching, S. 58-70.

finden. Die so zum Heil Gelangten bilden nun eine sekundäre, nicht auf Blutsbanden beruhende Gemeinschaft, Gemeinde oder Kirche.

In der ägyptischen Volksreligion ist es der vom Pharao repräsentierte Staat, welcher als Heilsanstalt das allgemeine Heil für die Ägypter (d.h. für die „Welt“) garantiert und die *mꜣt* (maat) verwirklicht. Die *mꜣt*, also das vom König heraufgeführte Heil, ist nichts Metaphysisches, Transzendentes, sondern eine normale Lebensform, in der auch Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität geübt wird. Der Zustand des Unheils verlangt nach Erlösung, aber das Heil bedarf der Erlösung nicht. Die altägyptische ethnische Religion, die an die zentrale Position der *mꜣt* glaubt, und so meint, im Heilszustand zu leben, kennt weder die Erlösung des Menschen, noch die der Welt. Jan Assmann, vielleicht der einzige Ägyptologe, der je das Wort „Heil“ in einem ägyptologischen Buch gebraucht hat, hat also vollkommen recht, daß „die Welt nach ägyptischer Vorstellung nicht der *Erlösung*, sondern nur der *Inganghaltung* bedürftig ist. Sie braucht den Herrscher, nicht den Heiland.“<sup>30</sup>

Der als *restitutio mundi* vollzogene kosmische Gottesdienst des Pharao begann zu der Zeit problematisch zu werden, als sich die Gesellschaft im Zeitalter des Hellenismus atomisierte und den Menschen durch ihre religiöse Erfahrung nicht mehr bestätigt wurde, daß sie in einen Heilszustand geboren worden sind. Dieser zentralisierte Kult ist nicht mehr geeignet, dem individuellen religiösen Bedürfnis zu genügen, und der Staatskult wiederum gibt dem Individuum dazu keinerlei Möglichkeit. Deshalb ist das Individuum schließlich zur Magie als einzigem Ausweg verdammt.

#### *Zwei nicht gewählte Wege (deus absconditus und die Mystik)*

In diesem existentiellen Vakuum (V.E. Frankl), in dem die Anwesenheit Gottes nicht sichtbar ist, tritt als innere Sehnsucht der Wunsch nach einer beruhigenden religiösen Lösung auf. In Ägypten wurde der sich verbergende Gott, der *deus absconditus* oder die *Gottesfinster-*

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<sup>30</sup> Ma'at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten, München, 1990, S. 222.

*nis* (M. Buber) nicht als theologische Reflexion formuliert, obgleich die Erfahrung, die ja universal ist, existiert hat. Mehr als zweitausend Jahre zuvor ermahnte König Kheti seinen Sohn Merikare:

Generationen um Generationen gehen dahin unter den Menschen,  
und Gott, der die Menschennatur kennt, hält sich verborgen. (XI. 3-4)<sup>31</sup>

In noch vorwurfsvollerem Ton klagt Ipuwer (12,5):

Wo ist er heute? Schläft er vielleicht? Siehe, seine Macht ist nicht zu sehen.

In Israel schleudert dies Elias den Priestern Baals noch drastischer ins Gesicht:

Ruft laut! Denn er ist ja ein Gott; er ist in Gedanken oder hat zu schaffen oder ist über Land oder schläft vielleicht, daß er aufwache. (I. Kön 8,27)

Nicht nur ihre Gegner, die Israeliten selbst kennen ja die Abwesenheit Gottes auch, wenn sie beten:

Gott, schweige doch nicht! Gott, bleib nicht so still und ruhig! (Ps 83,2)

Auch ein verzweifelter König ist keine Ausnahme. Er befragt Jahwe

... aber der Herr antwortete ihm nicht, weder durch Träume, noch durch die Urim, noch durch die Propheten. (1Sam 28,6)

Natürlich wurde diese quälende Erfahrung in diesem Frühstadium der ägyptischen Geschichte gegen Ende des dritten Jahrtausends vor Christus auch schon in einer ebensolchen religiösen Krise formuliert, wie wir sie in den Jahrhunderten vor und nach Christi Geburt finden. (Wir wissen, daß Ägypten in der Amarna- und Ramessidenzeit mit einer zweiten großen Religionskrise konfrontiert war.) Auch hier stellt sich die Frage, *warum es nach der Ersten Zwischenzeit nicht zu einem Religionswechsel gekommen und wie diese Krise bewältigt worden ist. Warum ist das gleiche in der Römerzeit nicht gelungen?* Später können wir dafür vielleicht eine Lösung anbieten. Wir wollen hier nur in Kürze so viel vorwegnehmen, daß zwar in der Ersten Zwischenzeit die Religiosität des Alten Reiches stark erschüttert wurde, die Kultur aber als Ganzes nicht zusammengebrochen ist, während unserer Meinung

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<sup>31</sup> H. Brunner, *Die Weisheitsbücher der Ägypter*, Zürich-München, 1988, S. 152.

nach im Ägypten der Römerzeit der Untergang des Kultes dadurch verursacht wurde, daß sich die Kultur in ihrer Struktur gewandelt hat. Wie aus dieser kurzen Anmerkung zu ersehen ist, halten wir den Zusammenhang und die gegenseitige Abhängigkeit von Kult<sup>32</sup> und Kultur für äußerst groß.

Die Erfahrung des *deus absconditus* hätte auch mit Hilfe der Mystik aufgearbeitet werden können, aber die ägyptische Religion kannte nicht den Weg der *unio mystica cum deo*. (Auch das Werden des Toten zu Osiris kann nicht als solche angesehen werden, denn Osiris wurde nie mit Osiris, dem Ersten der Westlichen, dem Herrn des Abydos vermischt. Die Mysterienreligion des Osiris ist, wie sie beispielsweise von Apuleius beschrieben wird, keine Mystik. Die einzige Annäherung an die Mystik in der Spätantike gibt es in der Gnosis, in der die *unio mystica* eine Realität ist.) In Ägypten hat nicht einmal der Einzelne den Weg der Mystik gewählt, die Staatsreligion aber kann sich naturgemäß nicht auf einer solchen individuellen Religiosität gründen. Wie fremd dem Ägypter im allgemeinen die mit der Mystik auftretende *vita contemplativa* war, wird dadurch gut demonstriert, daß die späteren koptischen Anachoreten kein kontemplatives Leben führten, sondern dem später als „*ora et labora*“ verdichtet formulierten Ideal folgten. Für sie ist die Mystik keine Lösung. Der, den sie gefunden haben ist Jesus, der Christus.

Aus der Krise der ägyptischen Religion gäbe es theoretisch auch einen anderen Ausweg: den der persönlichen Frömmigkeit. Als eine solche beschreibt Apuleius die Bekehrung des Lucius zu der Göttin Isis. Lucius gehört nicht zur ägyptischen Nation, er wurde nicht in den von der ägyptischen Religion dargebotenen Heilszustand hineinge-

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<sup>32</sup> Wir möchten hier und im folgenden den Kult im weitesten Sinne fassen als das auf die Machterfahrung des Heiligen im rituellen Rahmen antwortende Handeln des Menschen, als heiligen Raum, heilige Zeit, Wort, Opfer, Sakrament, Dienst usw., ungeachtet dessen, ob diese kollektiv oder privat, offiziell oder inoffiziell sind. Selbstverständlich hat jede Religion einen Kult, obwohl manche Theologen dazu neigen, z.B. den Kult im Alten Testament als minderwertig gegenüber der prophetischen Religion zu werten. Dagegen aber ist zu betonen, daß die altägyptische Religion eine Kultreligion ist.

boren. Er ist ein Außenstehender, der im Unheil dahinsiecht. Ja, er kann sogar in typischer Weise als Feind der Isis betrachtet werden, weil er in der Form des Osiris-Mörders Seth, in der Gestalt des Esels lebt. Aber auch der Seth-Mensch kann, wenn er von der großen Göttin Gnade erlangt, zum Heil kommen. Er wird als *mystes* geweiht und gelangt als Neugeborener in eine neue, sekundäre Gemeinschaft, in die Gemeinde der Isis-Gläubigen.

Zwei „unhistorische“ Fragen<sup>33</sup>

1. Warum siegte nicht die Isis-Religion über das Christentum oder „historischer“ formuliert: Warum war nicht die Isis-Religion, sondern das Christentum diejenige Religion, die auf die religiöse Verarmung, das existentielle Vakuum der mediterranen Völker eine adäquate Antwort geben konnte?

Das Defizit der europäischen Isis-Religion gegenüber dem Christentum muß man, glaube ich, nicht im Zentrum der Welt dieser Religion suchen, sondern wir werden es in den speziellen Problemen der Mission finden. Wie *Iesous Christos Theou Hyios Soter* ist, ähnlich ist auch Isis *soteir' athanate*,<sup>34</sup> *sospitatrix dea*<sup>35</sup> oder *conservatrix*.<sup>36</sup> Die Grenzen der sogenannten Isis-Mission werden, worauf S. Morenz aufmerksam macht,<sup>37</sup> dadurch gut illustriert, daß der Ober-

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<sup>33</sup> „Was wäre, wenn Kleopatra eine größere Nase gehabt hätte?“ halte ich nicht für eine illegitime Frage. Dazu, daß wir das *Warum* einer einstigen *Entscheidung* verstehen, ist das Stellen dieser unhistorischen Fragen nicht nur legitim, sondern Pflicht.

<sup>34</sup> Zitat J.G. Griffiths aus dem ersten Hymnus Isidors 26 (SEG 8,548), *The Isis-Book*, Leiden, 1975, S. 238.

<sup>35</sup> Apuleius, *Metam.* XI. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Bei den Römern ist *conservator* die Übersetzung des *soter*, während das von den Christen gebrauchte *salvator* bei Tertullian zuerst erscheint. F. Dornseiff, *PWRE* s.u. *soter*. 1927. S. 1219 ff.

<sup>37</sup> Ägyptische Nationalreligion und sogenannte Isismission. *ZDMG* 111 (1961). S. 432-436. Nachdruck S. Morenz, *Religion und Geschichte des Alten Ägypten*, Weimar, 1975, S. 521-526.

priester Mithras<sup>38</sup> den Lucius mit dem „aus dem Geheimgemach des Heiligtums“ geholten, „mit unverständlichen Schriftzeichen versehenen“ Buch (Metam. XI.22.) katechetisiert. Vor der Profanisierung, „vor der Neugier der Uneingeweihten“ wurde das Buch durch „die kurze Schrift einer Sprache, welche in Bildern von allerlei Tieren abgefaßt war, ... gesichert“,<sup>39</sup> das heißt, es handelte sich sicher um Hieroglyphen (oder kursive hieratische) Schrift. Auf einem aus Herculaneum stammenden Fresko sehen wir einen Morgengottesdienst, der dem von Apuleius beschriebenen Gottesdienst in Kenchreä<sup>40</sup> ähnlich ist und bei dem der in weiß gekleidete, auf den Stufen vor dem Heiligtum stehende Isis-Priester mit versteckten Händen die sogenannte Kanope umfaßt, in der das für das Ritual notwendige Nilwasser enthalten ist. Von den beiden links und rechts neben ihm stehenden, ein Sistrum schüttelnden Männern könnte der rechte ägyptischer Herkunft sein, worauf seine dunkle Hautfarbe hinweist. Oben auf der Treppe liegen zwei Sphingen, auf dem Geländer und beim Altar vor den Chorsängern schreiten ägyptische Ibis.

Zum Isiskult haben diese ägyptischen Bestandteile organisch dazugehört; die Heimat, der nationale Charakter sind mit der Religion verwachsen. (Wir können uns vorstellen, welches ein Problem es in den ferngelegenen Teilen des Imperiums darstellte, einen Priester zu finden, der des Lesens von Hieroglyphen kundig war oder Nilwasser zu beschaffen.) Diese sogenannte Isis-Mission war typologisch gesehen eine universale Religion, dennoch konnte sie sich in ihrem Kult nicht von der nationalen Bindung lösen. Dafür mußte die Mission mit

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<sup>38</sup> In der sogenannten Isis-Mission erscheint häufig der Name des Mithras, während in Ägypten Mithras ganz an der Peripherie bleibt. Vgl. G. Lease, *Mithra in Egypt*, in: B.A. Pearson — J.E. Goehring (Hrsg.), *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, S. 114-129.

<sup>39</sup> Apuleius, *Metamorphosen*, hrsg. v. R. Helm, S. 345.

<sup>40</sup> Auch Paulus verkehrt in Kenchreä, dem Hafen von Korinth (Acta 18,18), wo eine christliche Gemeinde existierte (Röm 16,1).

der Zeit teuer bezahlen.<sup>41</sup> Auch das spätere ägyptische Christentum war stark nationalistisch geprägt; dies hat sich nach dem Bruch auf dem Konzil im Jahre 451 gezeigt. Anstatt sich zum universalen Christentums zu entwickeln, wurde es zur Nationalkirche. Auch der ägyptische Nationalheilige Shenute wurde von keiner der christlichen Gemeinschaften angeeignet.

Das auf jüdischen Ursprung zurückreichende Christentum hatte mit denselben Problemen zu tun. Die Heilige Schrift, welche die Prophetien enthielt, war ursprünglich in hebräischer Sprache geschrieben worden — die christliche Mission jedoch hat sich gerade im Interesse der Verbreitung von Anfang an auf die in der alexandrinischen griechischen Tradition wurzelnde LXX gestützt.<sup>42</sup> Die hebräische Heilige Schrift hat weder im Kult, noch in der theologischen Interpretation eine Rolle gespielt. (Natürlich mußte auch das Christentum für die Ablösung von seinen Wurzeln teuer bezahlen. Der Unterschied jedoch ist, vom gegenwärtigen Standpunkt aus gesehen, daß dies nicht auf dem Gebiet der Mission, sondern im Bereich der Dogmatik durch sehr wesentliche Verschiebungen der theologischen Gewichtung, zum Beispiel bei den christologischen Titeln oder aber auch auf dem Gebiet des Kultes bei den Festen geschah.) Auch die Christen taufte der Tradition gemäß im Jordan, aber außerhalb Palästinas wurde dies mit Hilfe der aus der Exegese wohl bekannten Methode der Allegorisierung gelöst: das Taufwasser wurde ein für allemal als Jordanwasser gedeutet. Wir finden dafür ein gutes Beispiel aus unserem ägyptischen Kulturkreis in dem Papnutius zugeschriebenen koptischen Erzählungskranz „Geschichten der Wüstenväter“. Ein Abschnitt über die Lebensheiligkeit des Bischofs Psellusia berichtet darüber, daß nach dem Tod des alexandrinischen Patriarchen Timotheos und während der Thronbesteigung Theophils sich der neue Patriarch und die Bischöfe in Alexandria versammelten, in das Baptisterium traten und

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<sup>41</sup> „Sich abschließen in die nationale Tradition“ — so kann man mit dem von Géza Komoróczy geprägten Ausdruck den Charakter dieses Konflikts beschreiben. Vgl. ders. *Bezárkózás a nemzeti hagyományba*, Budapest, 1992.

<sup>42</sup> Locus classicus: Jes 7,14 *parthenos*.

dort (! in Alexandria) „über dem Jordan beteten“.<sup>43</sup> Das Christentum als Gemeinschaft der Neugeborenen fungierte nicht nur typologisch gesehen als universale Religion, sondern es löste sich auch im Kult von seinen ursprünglichen orientalischen Bindungen<sup>44</sup> (dies ist schon im Neuen Testament, hauptsächlich im Corpus Paulinum, festzustellen) und hat sich damit gegenüber der soteriologisch ähnlichen Isis-Religion in der Mission einen riesigen Vorteil verschafft.

Wir sehen also, daß auf die in einer gegebenen geschichtlichen Situation auftretende *challenge* (A. Toynbee) zwei Religionen mit ähnlichen Voraussetzungen zwei unterschiedliche *response* geben: die Isis-Religion bezahlt wegen ihres Festhaltens an der heiligen Tradition mit dem Erlahmen der Mission, das Christentum wiederum bezahlt für seine missionarischen Erfolge, wie jede Mission zu allen Zeiten, mit theologischem Synkretismus. Die sich jedoch als inadäquat erweisende Antwort (*response*), welche also auf die Herausforderung (*challenge*) nicht die „richtige“ Antwort gab, bedeutete für die betreffende Richtung, namentlich für die Isis-Religion, deren Tod.

2. Warum konnte die Isis-Religion, die in Europa so erfolgreich zu sein schien, dem Glauben ihres ägyptischen Mutterlandes keine Kraft geben und warum konnte dieses so sehr erschüttert werden, daß nur noch das Christentum jüdischen Ursprungs<sup>45</sup> ihm eine authentische Lösung geben konnte?

Wir haben oben gesehen, daß das relative Hindernis der Isis-Religion deren national geprägter Kult war. Aber warum erweist sich diese trotz allem siegreiche Religion nicht als ausreichend auf dem

<sup>43</sup> E.A.W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London, 1915, S. 470. 985.

<sup>44</sup> Nach Raffaele Pettazzoni ist bei der Mithras-Religion dieselbe *conditio sine qua non* zur Geltung gekommen: Sie erreichte in dem Maße Erfolge, in welchem sie ihre eigenen orientalischen Elemente („*ihr asiatisches Barbarentum*“) verleugnete und sich der Kultur der griechisch-römischen Welt anpaßte. Siehe: *The Monstrous Figure of Time in Mithraism*, in: *Essays on the History of Religion*, Leiden, 1954, S. 180-192.

<sup>45</sup> Der jüdische Ursprung verdient besondere Aufmerksamkeit, da man um die geschichtlichen und theologischen Folgen der antisemitischen Emotionen gegenüber dem hunderttausende Menschen zählenden alexandrinischen Judentum weiß.

alten ägyptischen Boden, wo sich ihr „Nationalismus“ vermutlich nicht nachteilig auswirkte? Dabei können mehrere Faktoren eine Rolle gespielt haben, zum Beispiel jener, daß Griechisch die Sprache der europäischen Isis-Religion war; dies könnte in Ägypten bereits ein Hindernis für eine angenommene „innere Mission“ gewesen sein. Wichtiger als dies jedoch ist, daß in dieser von uns als europäische Isis-Religion bezeichneten Richtung Sarapis eine wichtige Rolle spielte, zeitweise erscheint noch „Kynokephalos“ oder der „ibisköpfige Gott“, aber mit ihnen ist die Reihe der ägyptischen Götter mehr oder weniger zu Ende. Im Mutterland jedoch ist in den Tempeln von Philae, Kom Ombo, Edfu, Esna, Dendera u. a. trotz jeder Krise die Palette der Götter wesentlich breiter. Es ist aber auch gar nicht unser Ziel, den einzigen, sich im wesentlichen auf das Schicksal des Osiris beschränkenden Mythos der sogenannten Isis-Religion mit der sehr viel reicheren ägyptischen Mythologie zu vergleichen und auf die mythologische Armut der europäischen Isis-Religion zu schließen. Die Mythologie ist nach unserer Überzeugung zweitrangig und ist im gegebenen Fall, zwar nicht als Ganzes, aber in vielen Mythologemen austauschbar. (Auch das Christentum hat seinen Sieg nicht seiner reichen Mythologie zu verdanken. Diese ist sogar so eng, daß manche sie bis zum heutigen Tag nicht kennen oder ihre Existenz nicht annehmen wollen.)

Meines Erachtens war wohl auch hier das entscheidende Problem, daß die ägyptische Religion national war, während der europäische Isis-Kult zum Typ der Universalreligionen gehörte. Das mochte praktische und theologische Fragen gleichermaßen aufwerfen. Es heißt zum Beispiel in einer Inschrift von Esna: *„Lasse nicht einen Asiaten in den Tempel eintreten, sei er alt oder jung!“*,<sup>46</sup> und dies bezog sich wahrscheinlich auch auf jeden asiatischen geweihten Isis-Mysten. (Das Problem bestand nicht darin, daß dies kein Isis-, sondern ein Chnum-, Neith- und Hekatempel war. Zudem sind die Ägypter auch nicht im heutigen Sinne des Wortes „in den Tempel gegangen.“) Auch die Annäherung von der anderen Seite kann man sich schwer vorstellen. Hät-

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<sup>46</sup> S. Sauneron, Esna I., 1957, S. 197,20. Zitiert von Siegfried Morenz, Ägyptische Nationalreligion.

ten die letzten Hüter des alexandrinischen Sarapieions, Helladios als Priester des Zeus — offensichtlich Amons —, Ammonios als Priester des Affengottes — also Thots — und Olympios (die alle Hellenen und neuplatonische Philosophen waren) an den blutigen Opfern des ober-ägyptischen Kultes teilhaben können?

Es geht hier schließlich um einen strukturellen Unterschied: Der Ägypter, der seine altägyptische Religion ausübte, nahm an einem „kollektiven Bestreben“<sup>47</sup> teil, wohingegen der europäische Anhänger der Isis-Religion, der eine persönliche Entscheidung getroffen hat, als *Individuum*<sup>48</sup> Mitglied einer Gemeinde wurde. *Im Imperium ließ sich der Isis-Gläubige, der als Römer, Grieche, Kleinasiat geboren war, in das Mysterium einweihen und gelangte durch Initiationsriten in die Mysteriengemeinschaft, oder sagen wir, den Anachronismus bewußt übernehmend, in die Isis-Kirche. Demgegenüber stand der ägyptische Fellache schon seit seiner Geburt in dieser Religiosität.* In den Tempel ging er nicht (in dessen Inneres er sicherlich nicht eintreten durfte), am Tempelkult nahm er nicht teil, aber von Geburt an trug er an seinem Körper die Amulette der alten Götter und er wurde nach seinem Tod als Osiris begraben. *Er wurde nicht in die Osiris-Mysteriengemeinschaft eingeweiht, dennoch war er Teil jener universalen Heilsgemeinschaft wie jedes Glied seines Volkes.* Die Aufgabe war nur, diesen *kosmos*, also diese Ordnung, Anordnung, tagtäglich aufrechtzuerhalten und nicht zuzulassen, daß die zerstörerischen chaotischen Kräfte einbrechen. (Dies ist Aufgabe des Kultes.<sup>49</sup>) Wenn wir es wie zuvor mit einem Anachronismus ausdrücken, dann ist er in eine

<sup>47</sup> „Collective endeavor“, wie D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, Princeton, 1998, S. 6 sich ausdrückt, „... adherence to traditional religion was not an individual affair of personal salvation but a community affair“ S. 266.

<sup>48</sup> Tim Hegedus, *The urban expansion of the Isis cult: A quantitative approach*, in: *Studies in Religion* 27/2 (1998) 161-178, besonders S. 162.

<sup>49</sup> Der Kult ist hauptsächlich als königlicher Tempelkult zu verstehen, doch der Privatkult des Frommen ahmt den offiziellen Kult nach. Die Mythologeme beider und die dahinterstehenden religiösen Vorstellungen sind miteinander verwandt. Statuen und Flachbilder in den Tempeln und an kleinen Objekten des Privatkultes zeigen eine ähnliche Neigung.

Volkskirche hineingeboren. *Der Übergang zwischen beiden Religionsgemeinschaften wird nicht durch den soziologischen Unterschied erschwert, sondern durch den grundsätzlichen Gegensatz in der Heilsauffassung.* Deshalb wäre eine solche hypothetische „Innere Mission“ für Isis in Ägypten von vornherein zum Scheitern verurteilt gewesen.

Ähnlich war wohl das Verhältnis des aus dem Judentum hervorgegangenen, später auf hellenistischem Boden zum Mysterium gewordenen Christentums zum Judentum. Die Probleme tragen derart verwandten Charakter, daß der jüdische Nationalglaube so sehr ins Detail gehende Ähnlichkeiten aufweist wie zum Beispiel diese aus dem Jerusalemer Tempel stammende, heute im Archäologischen Museum zu Istanbul ausgestellte Verbotstafel zeigt: „Verbot für jeden Fremden, die Absperrung zu überschreiten und in den Bezirk des Heiligtums einzutreten. Jeder Übertreter, der ergriffen wird, trägt selbst die Verantwortung für das Todesurteil, das darauf steht.“

Fremde waren aus dem das Heil garantierenden Heiligtum so streng ausgeschlossen, daß sogar der Apostel Paulus getötet werden sollte, als man meinte, daß er den heiden(christlichen) Trophimos aus Ephesus in den Tempel gebracht hätte (Acta 21,28-29). Was das Judentum betrifft, so haben wir Kenntnis davon, daß es (anders als bei den Ägyptern) eine an das Judentum gerichtete (juden)christliche (innere) Mission gegeben hat. Ihre Heilige Schrift hatten sie — in der ersten Zeit — gemeinsam (der größere Teil ist es noch heute); die Grundlage ihres Glaubens, ihre Ethik, ihre Eschatologie und vieles andere verband die beiden. Die *differentia specifica*, *worin sie sich im wesentlichen unterschieden*, — ist nicht, wie viele meinen, die Person des Juden Jesus (denken wir nur daran, daß Mythologeme wechseln, aber die Strukturen unverändert bleiben; dies ist ja das Wesen jeden *survivals!*) sondern — *die grundlegend abweichende Soteriologie*. Die Juden lebten im Heilsbewußtsein, ihre Aufgabe war die Praxis des Kultes. Die das Diasporajudentum umgebenden „Hellenen“ (bzw. diejenigen unter ihnen, die ihre eigene Religion als verarmt erlebten) lebten im Zustand des Unheils und ließen sich deshalb in das jüdische Christus-Mysterium einweihen, von dessen Loslösung vom Judentum

man noch nichts wissen konnte. Für den jüden(christlichen) Paulus, den heiden(christlichen) Trophimos und die sich unter den Galatern organisierenden sogenannten Judaisten, beziehungsweise für die ganze Kirche im 1. Jahrhundert nach Christus, war die brennendste Frage, ob diejenigen, die außerhalb der Nation geboren waren und die an dem jüdischen Christus-Mysterium teilhaben wollten, Mitglieder im Körper der jüdischen Nation werden mußten oder nicht. Die Frage wurde freilich nicht mit dieser Terminologie diskutiert, aber sie war genau der Gegenstand des um die Notwendigkeit der Beschneidung aufflammenden heftigen Streites. Der Apostel Paulus hat die Frage verneinend beantwortet, aber gerade aus dem Brief an die Galater wissen wir, daß andere Christen (!) seinen Standpunkt überhaupt nicht teilten. Dasselbe Problem — ob einer, der *Isismystes* werden möchte, auch Ägypter werden muß — mag auch in der europäischen Isis-Mission aufgetaucht sein. Obwohl ich nicht weiß, ob diese Frage dogmatisch diskutiert worden ist, besteht aber kein Zweifel daran, daß aufgrund der überlieferten Zeugnisse im wesentlichen die Antwort „galatischen“ Typs gegeben worden ist, das heißt, der *mystes* wurde im Kult in ein importiertes Mini-Ägypten aufgenommen. Im Focus des jüdischen Christus-Mysteriums stand der Urheber des Heils, Jesus Christus; Judenchristen wie der Apostel Paulus waren die Katalysatoren dieser Mission. Sie selbst konnten ihr eigenes Judentum auch als Judenchristen authentisch leben, denn es gab zwischen ihnen und ihren orthodoxen Geschwistern keinen *wesentlichen* Unterschied. (Geschichtlich gesehen verschwinden sie deshalb nach dem ersten und zweiten jüdischen Krieg.) Die sogenannten Heidenchristen jedoch haben paradoxerweise eine im Wesen verschiedene Religion angenommen, obwohl auch sie sich zu dem im Focus stehenden Jesus Christus bekannten. Aber soteriologisch gesehen hat für sie dieser Jesus eine ganz andere Funktion: Er selbst ist das Pfand der *soteria*: „Ich bin der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben; keiner kann zum Vater kommen denn durch mich“ (Joh 14,6), während selbst für die Radikalsten von den Judenchristen Jesus der Messias ist (einer der von den Zeitgenossen tatsächlich erwartete Messiasse — aus dem Haus Arons und Davids

— bzw. einer der geschichtlich in der Zeit der Zerstörung des Zweiten Tempels aufgetretenen Messiasse).

Wir sehen also, daß vom ersten bis zum vierten Jahrhundert unserer Zeitrechnung neben den alten eingesessenen Religionen jene Kultgemeinschaften wirken, welche die griechischen und römischen Götter oder, im engen Kreis, Mithras<sup>50</sup> anbeten, daneben die Juden, die offenen oder getarnten Jünger Manis<sup>51</sup> und auch die Christen, in ihrer orthodoxen und gnostischen Erscheinungsform gleichermaßen. Einen Erfolg, begleitet von langsamen, aber sicheren Gebietseroberungen, haben nur die Christen erreicht. Wir müssen das so interpretieren, daß die anderen Religionen aus diesen oder jenen Gründen nicht oder in geringerem Ausmaß — oder genauer gesagt für weniger Menschen — in der Lage waren, auf jene religiöse Herausforderung (*challenge*) zu antworten, auf die, wie es scheint, das Christentum die adäquateste Antwort geben konnte. Ich glaube aber nicht, daß nur das Christentum dieser Herausforderung hätte entsprechen können, denn sonst hätte es überhaupt keine *Hellenen*<sup>52</sup> geben können.

Es gab wohl zahlreiche Menschen, für deren religiöse Probleme die Religiosität vom „hellenen“ Typ eine adäquatere Lösung bot, aber gerade für diejenigen, die den Zerfall und die Aushöhlung der al-

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<sup>50</sup> Gary Lease, Mithra in Egypt.

<sup>51</sup> Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa, The Manichaean Challenge to Egyptian Christianity, in: B.A. Pearson — J.E. Goehring (Hrsg.), The Roots of Egyptian Christianity, S. 307-319.

<sup>52</sup> Die ägyptischen Texte sprechen nie von *Heiden*, *Paganen*. Das wäre einerseits ein Anachronismus und andererseits irreführend, wenn wir die wirkliche Bedeutung des Wortes ernst nehmen, denn die Anhänger anderer Religionen waren in Ägypten nicht *pagani*, sondern im Gegenteil Städter, vor allem in Alexandria. Das von den Kopten für die Nichtchristen verwandte Wort „*Hellenen*“ bezeichnet den Kulturkreis und die religiöse Einstellung, die diese Gruppen vertraten. Das heißt gleichzeitig auch, daß sie sich selbst als Gegenpol nicht vorrangig der Anhänger der alten ägyptischen Religion, sondern der Hellenen verstanden. Daneben gebrauchten sie auch den Ausdruck „*Götzenanbeter*“. Mir ist nicht bekannt, daß sie diese beiden Worte im terminologischen Sinne verwendet hätten, ersteres also ausschließlich zur Bezeichnung der Anhänger der griechischen, letzteres zur Bezeichnung der Anhänger der ägyptischen Götter.

ten Religion innerlich erlebten, schien der Weg Jesu Christi gangbarer. Dies ist vom Standpunkt unserer Fragestellung her von Bedeutung.

### *Theomachie*

Wie vollzieht sich denn der Sieg des Christentums? Auf sehr gut sichtbare Weise, zumindest auf äußerlich besonders gut sichtbare Weise.<sup>53</sup> Kaiser Theodosius II. hat 391 den arianischen Bischöfen von Alexandria einen antiken Dionysos- und einen Hermes-(?)tempel übergeben; diese eignete sich jedoch der orthodoxe Patriarch Theophilos an. Der Patriarch hat während der Veränderungen in den unterirdischen Lagern Kultgegenstände, Götterstatuen und Phalloi gefunden, die er, um sie lächerlich zu machen, in der Stadt herumtragen ließ. Auf diese Provokation hin griffen die Hellenen zu den Waffen. Ihre Anführer waren drei Professoren der alexandrinischen Universität: Hella-dios, Ammonios und Olymp(i)os. Der Patriarch stellte ihnen im Kampf die frommen Wüsteneremiten gegenüber. Nach den Straßenkämpfen und einer schrecklichen Verwüstung fällte der Kaiser ein salomonisches Urteil: Die Hellenen bekamen keine Strafe, aber sie mußten den Christen das Sarapieion überlassen. Über das geschichtliche Ereignis hinaus ist für uns interessant, daß ein alexandrinischer Glaube in der Kultstatue des Sarapieions die Garantie für den Kosmos sah und behauptete, daß ihr Sturz das Weltende herbeiführt. Dennoch wagte einer der anstürmenden Soldaten die Statue mit seiner Axt zu zerschlagen. Für die christlichen Berichterstatter besaß dieser Bericht Bekenntniswert: Seht, die Welt ist nicht zusammengebrochen. Dessen psychologische Wirkung auf die verängstigten Zeitgenossen darf man nicht unterschätzen.

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<sup>53</sup> Socrates, Hist. eccl. V. 16, Sozomenos VII. 15, Rufinus, Hist. eccl. II. 22-26, Rudolf Herzog, Der Kampf um den Kult von Menuthis, in: Th. Klauser — A. Rücker (Hrsg.): *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums*. FS Franz Joseph Dölger, Münster, 1939, S. 117-124; L. Kákosy, Das Ende des Heidentums in Ägypten, in: *Graeco-Coptica*, Halle, 1984, S. 61-76. In beiden findet man weitere Literatur.

*In der Mission muß sich der neue Gott — wie bei einem Gottesurteil — stärker als der alte erweisen.<sup>54</sup> Hinter der profanen Ereignisgeschichte vollzieht sich eine Theomachie.*

Über eine in ihrer Konzeption sehr ähnliche Geschichte berichtet Papnute, der im IV. Jahrhundert lebte<sup>55</sup>: Makedonios, der in der Zeit des Patriarchen Athanasios der Statthalter von Philae (Philae) geworden war, suchte — da er orthodox war — auf der Insel eine christliche Kirche, fand aber keine, weil die Mehrheit der Bewohner Götzenanbeter waren. Als er während seiner Reise nach Alexandria den Patriarchen um einen Priester ersuchte, weihte dieser ihn zum Bischof. Als einmal der Priester des Falkentempels von Philae nicht anwesend war und im Kult von seinen zwei Söhnen vertreten wurde, ging Makedonios in den Tempel und tat, als ob er dem Falken ein Opfer bringen wollte.<sup>56</sup> Plötzlich brach er der Statue den Kopf ab und warf ihn in das Altarfeuer. Die zwei Jungen flohen, begegneten aber nach kurzer Zeit durch göttliche Fügung wieder dem Bischof. Die beiden Jungen wurden vom Bischof getauft und wurden Mönche. Der ältere erhielt in der Taufe den Namen Markus, der jüngere den Namen Jesaja, später wurden sie der zweite bzw. dritte Bischof von Philae. Bald darauf gelangte Aristos, der Oberpriester des Falken, vor den Bischof Makedonios und ließ sich taufen, und am gleichen Tag empfangen mit ihm zusammen alle bisher nicht christlichen Bewohner der Stadt die Taufe.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*, 3. Aufl., Tübingen, 1970. (3. Ausg.) S. 697-698.

<sup>55</sup> E.A.W. Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London, 1915. S. 445, 961.

<sup>56</sup> Von H. Junker wissen wir, daß der Falke von Philae *b3* des Re war, WZKM 26 (1912), S. 42-62. Natürlich hätte ein Privatperson das Sanktuar nicht betreten dürfen. Wahrscheinlich übersieht dies der fromme Autor der Legende (der selbstverständlich keine Geschichtschreibung, sondern Polemik treiben möchte). Der überweise Fachmann könnte sich jedoch auch vorstellen, daß der Statthalter als Stellvertreter des Königs angesehen wird und als Amtsperson im Heiligtum "opfert".

<sup>57</sup> Sicherlich kursierten zahlreiche ähnliche Geschichten, A. Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter*, Berlin, 1934, S. 416 zitiert die folgende: Die Priester eines Gottes Kothos

Man muß nicht besonders hervorheben, daß auf Philae, wie wir aus historischen Quellen wissen, der ägyptische Kult weiterlebte und daß sogar dann, als die Tempel der früheren Reichsgötter überall geschlossen werden mußten, der Isis-Tempel bis 535-537 mit Rücksicht auf die jenseits der Grenze lebenden Blemmyes und Noba aus Gründen der Staatsräson solange weitergewirkt hat, bis Kaiser Justinian den Kult beenden ließ.

Die Legende von Makedonios aber ist eine Perle der Missionsgeschichte, weil sie nicht nur die Theomachie repräsentiert, sondern weil in ihr aus Gründen der psychologischen Wirkung der Oberpriester Aristos und die zwei anderen Priester seine Söhne bekehrt und letztendlich das ganze Volk getauft wird.

Den Prototyp der literarischen Gattung eines erfolgreichen Missionsberichtes finden wir in der Bibel: Gideon erfährt in einer religiösen Krisensituation (Richter 6,13), in der die Götter der Midianiter stärker zu sein schienen (6,10) als der sich als Befreier, als „*soter*“ proklamierende Jahwe (6,8-9), die Theophanie seines Gottes und erhält den Befehl: „Reiße nieder den Altar Baals“ (6,25). Als am nächsten Morgen die Männer der Stadt die Tat des Kultschänders bemerkten, verlangten sie von Gideons Vater dessen Auslieferung, um ihn zu töten. Joas wies dies mit einer theologischen Argumentation zurück:

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stehen bei den Christen in dem Rufe, daß sie ihren Kinder stehlen und sie schlachten; mit ihrem Blute sollen sie den Altar besprengen und aus ihren Gedärmen Saiten für ihre Zithern machen. Der heilige Makarius von Tkou zerstört daraufhin ihren Tempel und verbrennt auf demselben Scheiterhaufen den Gott Kothos und seinen Hohenpriester, der Homeros hieß. An dem Tage ließen sich viele taufen von den Heiden; einige aber flohen und die Christen zogen in ihre Häuser. Palladius, Hist. Laus. 17. berichtet eine andere Geschichte: Ein wollüstiger Ägypter, der eine sittliche Christin ohne Erfolg verführen wollte, erkaufte sich den Dienst eines Zauberers, der die Frau in eine Stute verwandelte. Der bestürzte Gatte brachte sie zu dem berühmten Anachoreten, Makarios, dem Ägypter, der sie mit heiligem Wasser begoß und bewirkte, daß sie wieder als Frau erschien. Zum Schluß ermahnte er sie, daß sie sich nicht von der Kirche und besonders von den Mysterien d.h. die Eucharistie fernhalten sollte. — Man glaubte, daß die christliche Eucharistie dem heidnischen Zauber überlegen sei.

„Wollt ihr für Baal streiten? . . . Wer für ihn streitet, der soll noch diesen Morgen sterben. Ist er Gott, so streite er für sich selbst. . . ” (6,31).

In dieser Theomachie siegte Jahwe, und Baals Besuch blieb aus. Dasselbe spielte sich einige Jahrhunderte später ab, als Elia in der Zeit des israelischen Königs Ahab auf dem Berg Karmel mit 450 Propheten Baals und 400 Propheten Ascheras kämpfte (1.Kön. 18,17-40). Der Höhepunkt des Missionsberichtes ist die Akklamation, in der der Sieg des einen Gottes über den anderen proklamiert wird: „Als das alles Volk sah, fielen sie auf ihr Angesicht und sprachen: Jahwe — er ist der Gott, Jahwe — er ist der Gott!” (1.Kön. 18,39).

Für die Tat des Soldaten des Sarapieions oder des Bischofs Makedonios, durch die die alte Ordnung in den Grundfesten erschüttert wurde, gab es auch in späteren Zeiten eine Parallele: Der Heilige Bonifatius, der Apostel der Germanen, ging nach Thüringen, um mit dem Kult der alten Götter abzurechnen und fällte im Jahre 724 bei Geismar die dem Gott Thor geweihte Donarseiche und baute daraus eine Kapelle für den Heiligen Petrus. Viele ließen sich taufen und mit der Eiche fiel auch eine Stütze des alten Glaubens.

Der Siegeszug des Christentums ist an Bedingungen geknüpft, bei deren Realisierung manche Tragsäule der alten Religion deutlich sichtbar umstürzt. Wir haben den Sturz der alexandrinischen Sarapis-Statue und die Vernichtung der Kultstatue von Philae kennengelernt, aber in diese Reihe gehört auch die Einsetzung des römischen Kaisers zum Herrscher Ägyptens und damit auch zum obersten Priester. G. Hölbl hat in seinem außerordentlich interessanten Vortrag aufgezeigt, auf welche Weise ägyptische Priester mit der kultischen Manifestation der Theokratie auf diese Herausforderung eine Antwort zu geben versuchten.<sup>58</sup> Der König konnte durch den Priester, der den Ritus an seiner Stelle vollzog, oder von einem der königlichen Tiere, entweder von dem Apis oder von dem Falken von Philae oder Edfu verkörpert werden. Ein weiteres Dilemma konnte dadurch entstehen, daß

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<sup>58</sup> Wer ist der König in der Endphase der ägyptischen Religion? In: Akten des Vierten Internationalen Ägyptologenkongresses. Hrsg. v. S. Schoske. Hamburg, 1989, Bd. III, S. 261-268.

der nun schon außerhalb des Landes lebende „Pharao“ (und gleichzeitig Oberpriester) nach Konstantin Anhänger einer solchen Religion wurde, welche theologisch die Legitimität jedweder anderen Religion leugnete, so auch jener, in welcher er hätte „Pharao“, also der wichtigste kultische Vermittler sein müssen.

### *Krise der Soteriologie*

Trotz der Evidenz all dessen *sind die wirklichen Ursachen der inneren Verarmung der ägyptischen Religion noch tiefer zu suchen, und zwar im Herzen der Religion, in der Soteriologie.* Das Heilsdrama der Soteriologie muß im Tempelkult erscheinen. *Kult aber und Kultur hängen untrennbar miteinander zusammen.* Meines Erachtens können wir von diesem Punkt her die Antwort auf die Frage, „warum die ägyptische Religion verarmte“, aufrollen. *Solange die theologischen Fragen der Soteriologie, die Antworten des Kultes und die Kultur eine gemeinsame Sprache<sup>59</sup> besitzen, ist die Religion intelligibel und mit der Kultur kongruent. Wenn ihre Sprache anfängt, unterschiedlich zu werden, entsteht ein Bruch.<sup>60</sup>* Da das menschliche Denken von der Erfahrung des Alltags geprägt wird, formt sich dementsprechend auch seine Sprache (und Metasprache) und mit diesem veränderlichen begrifflichen Bestand *müssen* die alten geheiligten religiösen Traditionen — die Garanten der kosmischen Ordnung — weitestgehend konserviert

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<sup>59</sup> Unter Sprache verstehe ich in diesem Zusammenhang gleichermaßen die ägyptische und griechische Sprache wie auch das Weltbild einer Epoche wie z.B. das des Hellenismus als eine hinter allen stellbaren Fragen und gebbaren Antworten stehende universale Metasprache.

<sup>60</sup> Zu einer dem im Motto zitierten religionsphilosophischen Standpunkt Paul Tillichs ähnlichen Schlußfolgerung gelangt auch Heije Faber nach seiner religionssoziologischen und religionspsychologischen Fragestellung (Het lichtend geheim. Perspectieven in de godsdienstpsychologie, Baarn, 1991. S. 174). Die im Stammesverband herausgebildete Religion steht in einer urbanisierten Welt einem neuen Problem der menschlichen Existenz gegenüber. Das, was er „Mangel an Sicherheit“ nennt, erzeugt eine religiöse bzw. kirchliche Krisensituation. In dieser Situation wächst laut Faber die Bedeutung der kleinen Gruppe gegenüber der großen Institution Kirche. Unserer Meinung nach ist diese Konzeption nicht nur zur Umschreibung des heutigen, sondern auch des Zustandes vor 1800-1600 Jahren geeignet.

werden, während gleichzeitig unter dem existentiellen Zwang des *semper reformari* die Traditionen lebendig und zum *hic et nunc* *wirksam* gemacht werden müssen. Infolge der in der Zeit und durch die Zeit gereiften langsamen Kulturveränderung wird die innere Diskrepanz an einem Punkt unerträglich und der Bruch erscheint entweder innerhalb der Religion (Traditionserhalt versus Reform) oder zwischen Religion und Kultur. Im zweiten Fall ist der religiöse Bruch vermeidbar, ihre innere Einheit bleibt erhalten, aber die Kongruenz mit der Kultur und der alltäglichen Realität geht verloren. Dies bedeutet, übersetzt in die Sprache der Erfahrung (dazu gehört auch die religiöse Erfahrung), daß ihre *Wirkungskraft* zu Ende geht, wodurch gerade die Soteriologie am empfindlichsten beeinträchtigt wird. (Selbstverständlich ändert sich in der Sprache eines neuen Weltbildes auch die Kosmologie. Die naturwissenschaftliche Kosmologie bzw. deren Veränderung hat jedoch keine existentiellen Auswirkungen. Die religiöse Kosmologie aber — als der *in illo tempore* geschehenen Welt- und Kosmoserschöpfung — ist die *praefiguratio* dessen, was *hic et nunc* im Kult geschieht und was immer soteriologisch ist. Eine größere Bedeutung als die Kosmologie besitzt jedoch die Anthropologie.)

Wenn wir jetzt nicht mit dem schon gewohnten Blick des Ägyptologen, sondern mit dem frischen Blick eines Außenstehenden das Ganze der ägyptischen Kultur untersuchen, dann müssen wir für überraschend halten, wie wenig aus diesen drei Jahrtausenden auf die koptische Epoche gekommen ist. László Kákossy unternahm das Sammeln der *Survivals*,<sup>61</sup> und schon die Tatsache, daß diese an einer Hand abzuzählen sind, beweist, um wie wenige es sich handelt. Das Überraschendste ist für mich nicht, daß es wenige religiöse Zeugnisse gibt (denn das ist bei einem Religionswechsel natürlich), sondern daß sich zwei andere, scheinbar voneinander unabhängige Bereiche der Kultur, die Schrift und die Kunst, radikal gewandelt und bis zur Unkenntlichkeit von der Tradition abgelöst haben.

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<sup>61</sup> *Survival of Ancient Egypt*, in: *Studia in honorem L. Fóti*, Budapest, 1989, S. 263-287.

Die bisherigen Schriften verschwinden vollständig,<sup>62</sup> die Hieroglyphenschrift und das Demotische sind im 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus schon selten, ihr letztes Zeugnis stammt ganz von der Peripherie des Landes, aus Philae, der letzten Hochburg des alten Ägypten. Die späteste Hieroglypheninschrift<sup>63</sup> — charakteristischerweise eine religiöse Inschrift, datiert am Geburtstag des Osiris — stammt vom 24. August 394. Das Demotische ist nach der zweiten Hälfte des 2. Jh. n. Chr. kaum mehr in Gebrauch; die letzte datierbare Inschrift, der Kurztext einer Mumienetikette, stammt aus dem Jahre 260/261.<sup>64</sup> Das Aussterben der alten Schrift und damit der alten Literatur sowie des damit zusammenhängenden geschichtlichen Traditionsbewußtseins, das ab dem 2.-3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. sich vollzog, ist ein kaum überzubewertender Faktor bei der Schwächung der alten ägyptischen Religion. Es ist anzunehmen, daß nicht einmal die Priester als die Hüter des Kultes und der Kultur imstande waren, die demotischen Texte zu lesen.<sup>65</sup> Vom 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr. an erscheinen die ersten unsicheren Versuche (im Hinblick auf die Gegebenheiten hätten diese auch schon ein halbes Jahrtausend früher erscheinen können,<sup>66</sup> wofür aber kein innerer Anspruch bestand) und schon vom 2. Jahrhundert an haben wir die koptische Schrift mit den griechischen Buchstaben und sieben ergänzenden Zeichen vor uns, welche die Trägerin

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<sup>62</sup> H. Sternberg-el Hotabi, *Der Untergang der Hieroglyphenschrift*, CdE 69 (1994), S. 218-248.

<sup>63</sup> F. Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue of the Demotic Graffiti of the Dodecaschoenus*, Oxford, 1935, S. 436.

<sup>64</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, S. 251. Der allerletzte und isolierte demotische Text wurde von der Hand eines Isis-Pilgers in Philae am 11. Dezember 452 geschrieben. F. Ll. Griffith, *Catalogue* S. 377. Es gibt aber Grund anzunehmen, daß er nicht von einem Ägypter, sondern einem Nubier stammt.

<sup>65</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, S. 237 meint, daß „there is no reason to think that most (priests) were literate in Demotic“. Seiner Meinung nach gab es im Alltag nach 50 n. Chr. nur eine einzige Möglichkeit zu schreiben: nämlich griechisch, und nur etwa ein Zehntausendstel der Bevölkerung (a few hundred priests) las demotisch.

<sup>66</sup> Tatsächlich gab es seit der Zeit des Hellenismus Versuche der griechischen Transliteration ägyptischer Namen. Bagnall S. 238.

der neuen Religion und der neuen Literatur des neuen Zeitalters sein wird.<sup>67</sup> Der andere Bereich ist die Kunst: In Ägypten handelt es sich nicht um eine Kultur, die *nur* die Baukunst toleriert (wie im Falle des Judentums). Aber allein durch bloßes Daraufschauen auf ein Bauwerk, ein Fresko, ein Relief<sup>68</sup> oder eine Kleinplastik kann auch der Außenstehende sofort erkennen, daß diese durch eine ganze Welt von der Kunst des Alten Ägypten, auch in seiner spätesten Phase getrennt sind.

Das absolute Aussterben der Schrift wird einerseits, wenngleich es Gegenbeispiele dafür gibt, von einem Religionswechsel nicht ausreichend erklärt, denn hier handelt es sich nicht um eine Völkerwanderung, sondern dieselbe Bevölkerung existiert weiter. Die nächste Analogie dazu bildete, daß die griechischen und lateinischen Buchstaben die alten Religionen überdauert haben. Andererseits ist in Ägypten das Aussterben der Schrift nicht die Folge des Religionswechsels, sondern ging diesem voran. Die Schrift, die ausstarb, und die altägyptische Kunst, die völlig absorbiert wurde, sind gerade in ihrem Verschwinden erschütternde Zeugen der kulturellen Diskontinuität, mit der sich m. E. die Forschung noch nicht genügend auseinandergesetzt hat. Warum geschah dieser Kulturwechsel (der auch den dann folgenden Religionswechsel involviert)? *Darauf* kann ich keine

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<sup>67</sup> Rein technisch existiert die koptische Schrift seit dem 1. Jh. in sog. heidnischen Zaubertexten, wahrscheinlich aber nur in einem sehr begrenzten Kreis, sie wird aber bald zu einem Vehiculum der neuen Buchreligion(en), des Christentums (und des Manichismus und der Gnosis) und eben durch die Verbreitung dieser Religion(en) gelang sie zu einer raschen Blüte. Walter Till, Coptic and Its Value, in: Bull. of the John Rylands Library, Vol. 40 (1957), S. 229-258; Lexikon der Ägyptologie III, S. 731-737, s.u. Koptische Sprache; D. Frankfurter, Religion in Roman Egypt, Princeton 1998, S. 248-256. Manche behaupten sogar, daß „the use of the codex goes back to the beginning of the Christian book“ und „the miniature codex would seem to be a Christian invention“. Siehe C.H. Roberts, Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt, London, 1979, S. 10-12.

<sup>68</sup> Dieses Thema berührte zuletzt Nina Pomerantseva, Spread of the Traditions of Ancient Egyptian Art on the Iconography of Coptic Ritual Sculpture (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), in: Coptic Studies. Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies 1984, Warsaw 1990, S. 335-342.

Antwort geben, sondern nur die Tatsache registrieren, welche jenes Vakuum verursachte, das dann vom Christentum ausgefüllt wurde.

Schließlich gibt es da noch ein, am meisten abstraktes Symptom für den sich unbemerkt vollziehenden Kulturwechsel auf einem Gebiet, dessen Bedeutung für die Religion und speziell die Soteriologie augenfällig ist: die Veränderung des Weltbildes. Im koptischen Neuen Testament sehen wir, daß es griechische Lehnworte wie *soma*, *psyche*, *pneuma* usw. benutzt. Das verweist darauf, daß es in der eigenen Sprache keine muttersprachlichen Begriffe gab,<sup>69</sup> mit denen die inzwischen schon übernommene Anthropologie adäquat hätte ausgedrückt werden können. Zur gleichen Zeit sind die aus dem Altägyptischen jedermann bekannten, nicht sehr treffend als „Seelenformen“ bezeichneten Worte *k3* und *b3* verschwunden. Folglich hat sich die ägyptische Anthropologie zum Ende des pharaonischen Zeitalters hin irgendwann geändert und kann nun deren Stoff nicht mehr verwenden. Es ist offensichtlich, daß, wenn ein religiöses System den Menschen, seine Struktur, seinen Platz in der Welt usw. auf andere Weise beschreibt, dann auch die Soteriologie eine andere ist, denn sie ist im wesentlichen die *Restitution*<sup>70</sup> von dem allen.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> W. Vycichl, Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue copte, Leuven 1983, S. 25, s. v. *bai*.

<sup>70</sup> Die *restitutio mundi* ist sowohl ein kosmogonisch-eschatologisches Ereignis im Sinne von M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, Princeton, 1974, S. 72-73, als auch das Herz der Soteriologie, denn die *restitutio omnium* (Act 3,21 Vulg.) ereignet sich „ut deleantur vestra peccata“, „ut convertat se unusquisque a nequitia sua“ (Act 3,19.26). Wenn eine strukturell gewandelte (oder als solche betrachtete) Welt, die nicht mehr mit der vergangenen identisch ist, *restituiert* werden soll, dann muß auch das *quomodo* der erhofften *soteria* gewandelt werden, meint jedenfalls der Gläubige.

<sup>71</sup> Es ist beispielsweise bekannt, daß die Heilslehre des Buddhismus an bestimmte Fragen ganz anders herangeht als die westlichen Religionen, weil seine Anthropologie von der uns gewohnten abweicht. Die Frage des Lebens nach dem Tod wird auch dort aufgeworfen (als Reinkarnation). Es ist der Zwang des Kreislaufes des *sanskara*, wo das Heil das Heraustreten aus diesem Kreislauf und das Erreichen des *Nirvana* ist. Im Gegensatz dazu steht die Hoffnung der westlichen Religionen auf Auferstehung und ewiges Leben und die Angst der westlichen Religionen vor dem ewigen Vergehen. Der

Die neue Religion Ägyptens ist voll von griechischen Lehnwörtern, welche gerade von theologischer Wichtigkeit sind. Wir können aber nicht sagen, daß der neue Glaube den Ägyptern ein neues Weltbild gebracht hat. Es ist genau umgekehrt: Sie hätten es nicht übernehmen müssen, wenn nicht das alte inhaltslos geworden wäre und man sich nicht nach etwas neuem gesehnt hätte.

*Zusammenfassung:* Zwischen dem typologisch als ethnische Religion erscheinenden, theologisch auf die Ordnung des Kosmos achtenden Staatskult und der das Heil des Einzelnen in den Mittelpunkt rückenden individuellen Frömmigkeit wurde in den letzten Jahrhunderten der ägyptischen Geschichte die Kluft zu groß. Äußerlich und zum Schein wurden diese zwei getrennten Welten noch von der gemeinsamen Kultur zusammengehalten, aber vom Standpunkt der Frömmigkeit hat ersterer immer mehr an Bedeutung verloren und als die geschichtlichen und kirchengeschichtlichen Krisen auftraten, hat sich dies auch sichtbar manifestiert. Auf die hier anachronistisch, in mittelalterlicher Prägung zitierte, jedoch in der Spätantike genauso geltende Grundfrage der individuellen Frömmigkeit — „Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott?“ (Luther) — konnte die zum großen Teil zur Magie gewordene Religion keine authentische Antwort geben. Hinter dem Wertverlust steht in der Tiefe das Problem der Kulturkrise und der weltanschaulichen Wegsuche eines seit mehr als tausend Jahren unter fremder Herrschaft lebenden Volkes. In diesem existentiellen Vakuum bieten mehrere Religionen ihre eigene Lösung an, aber das Christentum war, wie die Geschichte bewiesen hat, die einzige, welche die von den Ägyptern ersehnte Lösung gebracht hat.

Wenn meine obigen Thesen stimmen, müssen wir nur noch eine Frage beantworten: Wie ist es möglich, daß dasselbe Ägypten sich einige Jahrhunderte später wie jemand, der eine neue existentielle

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Buddhismus leugnet das Vorhandensein von ewigen Geistmonaden. Es gibt für ihn also auch keine unsterbliche Seele. Deshalb spielt diese bei dem Problem der Geburt einer neuen Persönlichkeit und bei der Sicherung der Identität des Gestorbenen und Wiedergeborenen auch keine Rolle (H. v. Glasenapp, *Die Religionen Indiens*, Stuttgart, 1943. S. 221-238, besonders S. 224-228).

Herausforderung (*challenge*) erfährt, dem Islam hingibt, ohne daß die Zeichen einer ähnlichen geistigen Krise, wie wir sie oben beschrieben haben, erkennbar gewesen wären?

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## BOOK REVIEWS

MARK C. TAYLOR (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* — Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press 1998 (v + 423 p.) ISBN 0-226-79157-2 (pbk.) US-\$ 55.00.

WILLI BRAUN & RUSSELL T. MCCUTCHEON (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion* — London & New York: Cassell 2000 (xii + 560 p.) ISBN 0-304-70176-9 (pbk.). US-\$ 24.95.

Contrary to some prophecies that depict a secularized world of individuals without religious commitments religions are still and again an integral part of public discourse. And in contrast to some scholars' opinions that religious studies should be abandoned in favor of cultural, social, or anthropological studies the demand for experts in the religious field is even increasing. No wonder then that during the last decade there has been published an impressive amount of theoretical contributions to the study of religions, all of them reflecting and carefully reacting to the changing methodological claims of cultural studies in a so-called postmodern world: for instance, the critical evaluation of preconceptions, theological biases, and power relations; a multifaceted perspective both in research and historical narration; and a call for interdisciplinary approaches that no longer use "religion" as an analytical category *sui generis* but as the result of social construction and constant negotiation.

Scholars from North America have been especially productive in this discussion. The two volumes reviewed here are fine examples for this because they, bringing together leading experts of different directions, allow a glimpse into present-day workshops rather than give a clear-cut answer what "religion" today is about. If one wants to follow Mark C. Taylor's introductory essay in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, the self-critical evaluation of the discipline's foundations "resulted in the two most important characteristics of contemporary religious studies. The responsible study of religion today is multidisciplinary and multicultural" (p. 12). Thus, instead of claiming a master narrative of any kind, the essays collected in this volume represent a multifocussed approach to the phenomenon people in the West

are used to calling "religion." The book is "intended as a guide for people who are seeking a more adequate understanding of the history as well as the contemporary significance of religion" (p. 16). To reach this goal, the editors when choosing the terms that should be included in the volume "tried to create a balance between the expected and the unexpected" (p. 17). So we find among the first category terms such as "belief," "God," or "sacrifice," whereas "image," "performance," or "relic" might belong to the latter category.

The 22 essays, arranged without subdivisions in alphabetical order and ranging from "Belief" to "Value," in most cases describe the formation or rather construction of their respective terms in historical perspective. That approach is much better than limiting oneself to examples of application which are not representative of the issue, as Jill Robbins does when she spends half of her "Sacrifice" essay on the *aqeda* *Yitshaq* described in Gen. 22.

The term "critical" is not self-evident. The editors limit its meaning simply to "useful" or "crucial, decisive, important, momentous, pivotal" (p. 16). This decision results in the inclusion of entries that may be seen as arguable in more than one case. It is not the crucial importance within the history of religions that seems to constitute the reason for including a term, but the sometimes random value given to certain terms in contemporary discourse. For example, "ritual" is not among the terms considered as critical. This is astonishing given the fact that ritual studies are one of the most flourishing ventures of contemporary research; they cannot simply be subsumed *sub voce* "performance." Likewise, if a reader wanted to learn something about magic, she or he would not find a critical evaluation of this important yet highly biased term. Finally, the focus on the discourse of the day is also responsible for the lack of any reflection on "history" as a critical term in itself. That aspect has been pointed out by Hans G. Kippenberg in this journal ("Religious History, Displaced by Modernity," *Numen* 47 [2000], pp. 221-243).

Despite these remarks, the majority of the essays assembled for *Critical Terms* are important contributions and show a quality of self-reflective scholarship that is extraordinary. A few of them, e.g. "Modernity" (Gustavo Benavides), "Religion, Religions, Religious" (Jonathan Z. Smith), or "Territory" (Sam D. Gill), may even gain canonical status within the academic study of religions.

Hence, the terrain was well marked when Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon edited their *Guide to the Study of Religion*. In contrast to

the numerous “classical approaches” to the study of religion, their volume is intended to give the student or scholar a few hints as to what religion is and what the appropriate means for studying this phenomenon in an interdisciplinary way are. In the words of Willi Braun, the *Guide* is “an ‘atlas’ of ‘maps’ to the ‘field’ of the study of religion” (p. 6). Again, no normative answers are to be expected, rather careful analyses of different conceptualizations of religion. Therefore, it appears confusing when Braun presents a full-blown definition of “religion” (following Bruce Lincoln) as (a) ordinary and mundane discourses of *arts de faire* that are characterized (b) by an orientation to speak of matters transcendent and eternal and (c) by a desire to speak of these matters with an authority equally transcendent and eternal (cf. p. 10). Although it is helpful to know the editors’ views about what religion is, this preconception limits the range of possible approaches to the study of religion, especially when one takes into account the introductory character of the volume.

The 31 essays are plausibly grouped around three different aspects in religious studies: “Description,” i.e. the work and problem of definition, classification, comparison, and interpretation; “explanation,” i.e. concepts both traditional and contemporary that try to categorize religion and create a theoretical system (here a close relation to the volume *Critical Terms* is obvious); and “location,” which is understood as examining the social context of the scholars’ work, because “the pursuit of ‘religion’ neither was nor is a pure and isolated affair” (Braun on p. 17). Instead of “location” the editors might have labeled this section “contextualization” or “reflection,” because usually the spatial metaphor has a different connotation, namely with regard to the locality of religions, to migration, Diaspora, and representation. But beside this minor detail, the essays nicely represent the threefold intention of the editors — “to lay out what religion scholars do, provide some insight into why they are doing it, and, in the final section of essays, give some thought to the question of what effects religion scholars’ doings have” (p. 18).

A highlight of its own is the essay “play” by Sam D. Gill, and the editors were wise enough to set it aside as an “epilogue.” Although describing the academic study of religion as a play seems at first glance to underestimate its serious impacts on the people studied — cf. David Chidester’s essay on “colonialism” —, the notion of a playful mechanism that establishes academic theories and social negotiations is an adequate description of what religious scholars do. But “play” does not mean that what we are doing

is totally arbitrary and contingent, because plays have their own rules (the question is: who establishes those rules?).

To sum up, both volumes discussed here are indispensable contributions to the debate in the field of religious studies. Both are examples of a responsible, self-critical, and interdisciplinary scholarship; thus, they can be recommended to students of religion as well as to anyone else interested in such issues. Whereas the *Guide* seems valuable for introductory classes in particular, *Critical Terms* should find its place in every serious scholar's library.

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MARTIN RIESEBRODT, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen. Fundamentalismus und der "Kampf der Kulturen"* — München: Verlag C.H. Beck 2000 (154 p.) ISBN 3-406-45928-5 (pbk.) DM 22.90.

The author, whose previous work includes one of the classical studies on fundamentalism, in his new book engages in an exploration of the present coexistence of secularization and religious revivalism. Refining important analytical tools and concepts, Riesebrodt situates recent research in a theoretically reflected perspective. In this respect, Riesebrodt's book is a useful stimulus for further research.

The foundation of the theoretical arguments rests in an evaluation of Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*. The author develops a notion of cultural difference inside civilizations rather than one that coincides with geographical borders, especially between the West and Islam. While Huntington conceived of religion as the functional nucleus of a civilization, Riesebrodt's conception of religion gives religious practices and actions priority over meaning and culture. In this respect the author identifies a special type of religious practices that intervene in situations of crisis. The crisis implied in these practices is a disbelief in a human control of nature, body and social orders. Fundamentalist movements are rejecting that belief and propagate either utopian ethics of commitment or a return to a "primordial" moral order with its divine laws — a return that can be legalistic or charismatic.

In the author's inquiry it becomes evident that the clash of "civilizations" is often a split *within* civilizations rather than a conflict *between* civilizations. Accordingly the author introduces the new notion of "cultural milieus". Convincingly he argues that the neo-marxian understanding of culture as an ideology of a class has failed to explain the rise of a culture, in which different classes are participating. Pierre Bourdieu likewise is apparently unable to develop a concept dealing with these kinds of differences. A similar criticism is directed at Ulrich Beck who assumed a disappearance of this type of milieus due to an alleged increase in individualization and detraditionalization. In contrast to Beck, Riesebrodt argues that a new cultural milieu has risen composed of different social classes (marginal middle classes, intellectuals, technical intelligence, migrants and other). This cultural milieu is bound through consensus about a moral decline in modern culture and the need for a return to the sanctified traditional moral values due to the threat of an imminent last judgement.

The focus on family and the relations between the sexes in the modern world explains much of the internal strength of these movements. M. Riesebrodt here points to an important distinction. While charismatic movements offered women chances of equal participation in spiritual activities, literalistic groups defending the inerrancy of the holy writing favored patriarchal hierarchy and were strictly antifeminist. Focusing on South Korea as an example the issue of participation of women in both types of fundamentalism is analyzed in detail. The last chapter scrutinizes the issue of women in fundamentalist movements more deeply. The author here points to the paradox that women active in today's revivalist movements are redefining their role in a non-traditional manner, but in the end support the traditional hierarchy.

This book points to the complexity of the relationship between religious and secular forces. It is an insightful analysis of the revival of religious traditions in a period of secularization and the resulting ambiguity of the established borderlines between religious and secular cultures. This work is an important and extremely useful paradigm for religious studies.

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HANS G. KIPPENBERG

KEITH HOPKINS, *A World Full of Gods: Pagans, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire* — London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1999 (viii + 402 p., 30 plates) ISBN 0297819828 (cloth) £25.00.

"The past is a foreign country," the novelist has written (Leslie Hartley *The Go-Between*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953: 1), and no past has proved more foreign than that of Christian origins — despite (or perhaps because of) popular presumptions to the contrary. The historiographical question is how to access this, or any past, especially when the surviving data has been preserved and largely shaped by a presiding orthodoxy. In the last five years, three different scholars have approached this problem with respect to Christian origins in three quite different but innovative ways: Burton Mack, a New Testament scholar, has proposed a history of the new Christianities based on a comprehensive reassessment of their literature as products of their formative social interests (*Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995); Rodney Stark, a sociologist of religion, has offered his own reassessment of the "rise of Christianity" by supplementing historiographical research with sociological theories (*The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and now, Keith Hopkins, a historian of western antiquity, has joined the fray with his own highly imaginative account of, in the words of the subtitle of the U.S. edition of his work (New York: The Free Press, 2000), "the strange triumph of Christianity." All three of these recent works are controversial: Mack's social histories challenge the basic outline of Christian origins which has been generally accepted since the fourth century; Stark's sociological models, developed primarily from his studies of the contemporary American religious situation, question conclusions held by historians of antiquity; and Hopkins' imaginative reconstructions of everyday life in the Graeco-Roman world, conceived as "an experiment in how to write religious history" (p. 2), have raised the hackles of more conventional academic historians. His first chapter is a case in point.

Entitled "A World Full of Gods," the opening chapter in Hopkin's study is conceived as the report of two time-travellers who visit Pompeii shortly before the eruption of Vesuvius and the destruction of the city in 79 A.D. In Hopkins' experiment, the "[t]ime-travellers stand for one version of history, fictionalised in order to expose the difficulties which all historians face in recreating the past" (p. 3). It also addresses the issue of how historians might briefly but adequately present the context of their selected study. Whereas

historians of early Christianity typically offer an academic overview of the Graeco-Roman world or an outline of “religion” in that world in an opening chapter, Hopkins opts to present a brief but lively report of life in a first-century Roman town which he imaginatively recreates on the basis of careful and comprehensive references to classical texts, epigraphy and archaeological reports, a technique which allows him to integrate textual evidence with the generally disregarded data of material culture, the latter exemplified from thirty high-quality plates. The result is a vivid evocation of everyday life in the cultural world with which the early Christianities had to engage, a world which, in Hopkins stunning portrayal, is indeed, “full of gods.”

Other experiments in the imaginative vein of Chapter 1 include a TV drama based on the Dead Sea Scrolls (Chapter 2) which attempts to “recapture the atmosphere and passion of Qumran” (p. 60) and to dramatize the continuities and differences between one form of ancient Judaism and one form of early Christianity (p. 67); a return to brief reports from the time-travellers on their impressions of magical practices in Tebtunis (Egypt), of rites in honor of Cybele and Attis practiced in Hierapolis (Syria), and of life on the streets in Ephesus (Chapter 5); and a “previously unpublished” letter by Macarius, a recent convert to Christianity which describes a conversation over dinner at which his new Christian faith is challenged by pagan guests, on the one hand, and by a Jewish guest on the other (Chapter 6). And, since Hopkins notes that “stories, not analysis, were the stuff of religious persuasion” in the Roman world (p. 4), he offers his own retelling of stories from the apocryphal Acts of John, the Acts of Andrew, and the Acts of Thomas (Chapter 4) and his synopsis of gnostic and Manichaeian stories of creation (Chapter 7). Hopkins only engages in “conventional” historiographical narrative in Chapter 3 on “The Christian Revolution,” where he gives his analysis of “the processes by which Christianity gradually separated from its Jewish background” (p. 80) and in Chapter 8 on “The Construction of the Sacred Hero,” his insightful account of the often neglected development of the various representations of Jesus. All of this is interspersed with letters (purportedly) exchanged between Hopkins and fellow scholars, some (all?) of whom were participants with him in a research project on early Christianity at King’s College, Cambridge which was the stimulus for Hopkin’s book and who are all critical of Hopkins’s work, primarily of his approach. The result: imaginative reconstructions, narrative retellings, conventional “objective” histories, critical challenges, work together to offer an accessible and engaging portrait

of early Christians emerging from and interacting with real complexities in an actual social, political and religious world — an experiment in writing religious history, indeed, but an experiment that falls well within the bounds of current “conventional” scholarship on the subject but that far surpasses that scholarship in its pedagogical power.

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Book Reviews

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## A TWICE-TOLD TALE: THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS' HISTORY

JONATHAN Z. SMITH

In Shakespeare's curiously neglected play, *King John* (III.4, line 108), in William Broome's eighteenth century translation of the *Odyssey* (XII.538), as well as in the title of Nathaniel Hawthorne's first published collection of short stories, the phrase, "twice-told tale," signifies tedium. By contrast, for those of us who study religion, twice-told or twice-performed is understood to be a minimal criterion for those basic building blocks of religion: myth and ritual. For us, repetition guarantees significance. Indeed, we demand more. In Jane Harrison's suggestive characterization, ritual (or myth) is "representation repeated,"<sup>1</sup> thus doubling the twice-told, twice-performed quality.

Harrison's formulation reminds us as well of the nature of our enterprise. As is characteristic of the human sciences in general, the little prefix *re-* is perhaps the most important signal we can deploy. It guarantees that we understand both the second-order nature of our enterprise as well as the relentlessly social character of the objects of our study. We re-present those re-peated re-presentations embedded in the cultures and cultural formations that comprise our subject matter.

I labor this point at the outset to make plain one presupposition which will guide my remarks. The history of the history of religions is not best conceived as a liberation from the hegemony of theology — our pallid version of that tattered legend of the origins of science, whether placed in fifth century Athens or sixteenth century Europe, that depicts science progressively unshackling itself from a once regnant religious world-view. Our variant of this twice-told tale needs to be set aside, not because such a claimed liberation has been, in so

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<sup>1</sup> J. Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1918), 42.

many moments of our history, an illusion, but rather because this way of retelling the tale occludes a more fundamental issue that yet divides us. In short-hand form, this is the debate between an understanding of religion based on *presence*, and one based on *representation*. But, I get ahead of myself . . .

As in any historiographic enterprise, the history of the history of religions may be imagined in a variety of ways. Each is appropriate to the interests of their fashioner. While the mappings remain curiously consistent, there have been, in fact, two major opposing stratagems: the exceptionalist and the assimilationist. Each, in its own way, seeks legitimation, seeks a place for the study of religion on the map of recognized academic disciplines. The exceptionalist insists on the distinctive (or, unique) nature of the subject matter of the study of religion; the assimilationist argues for the equivalence (or, parity) of the methods of the study of religion with those of other human sciences. In either case, the mode of representation is genealogical, a narrative of founders and schools which often takes the form of an inverted tree diagram. While this mode was common in both the biological sciences and the linguistic sciences — abstaining from the debates as to which one influenced the other — it has now been subjected to strong critique in both fields in favor of a more diffuse, tangled, multicausal and interactive representation. For example, the evolutionary biologist, W. Ford Doolittle has written, this year, in an article entitled, “Uprooting the Tree of Life,” that the schematization of the origins of life “look more like a forkful of spaghetti than a tree.” Similarly, one might cite the strictures of Colin Renfrew and Bruce Lincoln with respect to the Indo-European tree diagram, building, in part, on Schuchardt’s and Schmidt’s wave theory.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, while in what follows I shall employ conventional periodization, I

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<sup>2</sup> The tree or inverted tree diagram has had a long history in biological and linguistic representations. For an important collective volume on the image with rich bibliographies, see, H.M. Hoenigswald and L.F. Wiener, eds., *Biological Metaphor and Cladistic Classification: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Philadelphia, 1987). I have taken the quotation by W. Ford Doolittle, “Uprooting the Tree of Life,” *Scientific American* (February, 2000) from *The New York Times* (June 13, 2000), D 2.

would stress that each of these has exceptionally fluid boundaries, and are properly thought of as pluriform phenomena. Thus, one should, for example, talk of Renaissances, and take pain to specify which Enlightenment one is speaking of.

While this is a historiographical discussion well worth pursuing, it is also somewhat misleading. It assumes that the study of religion is best mapped by being attentive, at the outset, to the occasional instances of reflexive, meta-discourse in the field, to its defining moments, rather than the “normal science” of its quotidian praxis. If we start, so to speak, on the ground, a different constellation of characteristics emerges, which gives rise to a different sort of narrative as well as to a different sense of urgency with respect to matters of second-order discourse.

If some alien, unfamiliar with the fierce eighteenth and nineteenth century taxonomic controversies concerning the classification of the academic disciplines, were to observe scholars of religion in action, it would have no difficulty identifying the class to which they belong. With respect to practice, the history of religions is, by and large, a philological endeavor chiefly concerned with editing, translating and interpreting texts, the majority of which are perceived as participating in the dialectic of ‘near’ and ‘far’. If this is the case, then our field may be redescribed as a child of the Renaissance.<sup>3</sup>

While there are surely precursors (the historian’s always present temptation towards infinite regress), it is the various projects associ-

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For the strictures on the tree diagram in Indo-European linguistics, see C. Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (Cambridge, 1987) and B. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), esp. pp. 211-16. The theoretical basis of the rival “wave theory” was revisited in E. Pulgram’s classic article, “Family Tree, Wave Theory, and Dialectology,” *Orbis* 2 (1953), 67-72. The theory ultimately depends on the works of H. Schuchardt, *Der Vokalismus des Vulgärlateins* (Leipzig, 1868), vol. 3, and J. Schmidt, *Die Verwandtschaftsverhältnisse der indogermanischen Sprachen* (Weimar, 1872).

<sup>3</sup> In this brief sketch of Renaissance linguistics, I have relied, above all, on M.-L. Demonet, *Les voix du signe: Nature du langage à la Renaissance, 1480-1580* (Paris-Geneva, 1992).

ated with the equally various Renaissances that set the agendum of our field. First, the sheer mastery of others' languages — a characteristic that still marks our field within the contemporary academy — whether their otherness be expressed in terms of temporal or spatial distance. Second, the etymological conviction, still regnant, that there is something of surpassing value hidden 'beneath' the words, a something that is essential, as opposed to the verbally accidental, and that may be uncovered only by decipherment; or, the comparable rhetorical conviction that values the givenness of the 'real' concealed 'behind' the words. Third, building on this etymological conviction, the tension between perceptions of unity and diversity in cultural formations was often settled by the postulation of an essential similarity in the face of accidental difference. The accident to be explained by either environmental differences or the diffusing effects of historical processes. These issues became urgent because of the unanticipated increase of data for variegation, each the product of specific, European, historical causes. To list only three.

(1) The movement north and west of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts following the capture of Constantinople and the expulsion of Jews from Spain, both of these not unrelated to an expansive Islam, presented Renaissance scholars with an internal other, an ancestral past profoundly distant and different from the then European present. A past which was now only accessible through acts of imagination.

(2) The European colonial and mission adventures in the Americas as well as in Africa and Asia gave rise to a number of unanticipated consequences. The unexpected presence of the Americas shattered the classical biblical and Greco-Roman imagination of the inhabited geosphere as a tripartite world-island, thus giving rise to the first new intellectual confrontation with the problem of human and biological difference as possibly signalling otherness.<sup>4</sup> Were the Americas created separately? Were their inhabitants not descendants from Eden? In the

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<sup>4</sup> On the issues engendered by the novelty of the Americas, see, J.Z. Smith, "What A Difference A Difference Makes," in J. Neusner and E.S. Frerichs, eds., *"To See Ourselves As Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico,

case of both the Americas and Africa, there was, as well, the production of ethnographic texts in which European words replaced and represented those of the native.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Asia, a different result was the collection and translation of significant texts in hitherto unknown languages.<sup>6</sup> Then too, there were, also, in Asia, contacts with kinds of Christianities, not experienced since the thirteenth century, whose difference from familiar European forms was often perceived as more problematic and therefore more threatening than native religions.

(3) This latter perception resonated with a European one in which the schismatic impulses of emergent Protestantisms raised a host of questions as to religious credibility and truth. These rival claims to authority made implausible older heresiological explanations for internal diversities.<sup>7</sup>

In each of these cases, languages and religions became the privileged cultural formations in which the controversies of unity and difference were framed. Indeed, as already suggested, it was most often the then regnant linguistic model of essence/accidence that governed these controversies when applied to religion. It is, therefore, here, as well, that the debate over what would become the question of 'reli-

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1985), 3-48 and Smith, "Close Encounters of Diverse Kinds," in S. Mizruchi, ed., *Religion and Cultural Studies* (Princeton, 2000), in press.

<sup>5</sup> On the production of ethnographic texts focusing on indigenous American and African religions, Ramón Pané, *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* (ca. 1495) seems to be the earliest for the American. See, among others, E.G. Bourne, "Columbus, Ramon Pane and the Beginnings of American Anthropology" (Worcester, MA, 1906: offprint, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*); *Fray Ramón Pané; Relación . . .*, ed., J.J. Arrom (Mexico City, 1988). H. Louis Gates has given an oral report of the Mellon-Harvard-Timbucto project which recovered a 1453 Arabic manuscript produced at the University of Timbucto on African indigenous religions which would represent an early example from a different expansionist movement.

<sup>6</sup> While scattered throughout the work, the most convenient guide to Asian language materials and translations in Europe remains D. Lach's multi-volumed study, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago, 1965-93).

<sup>7</sup> On the issue of external and internal diversities, see J.Z. Smith. "Religion, Religions, Religious," in M.C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago, 1998), esp. pp. 270-76.

gion' and 'the religions' first took on imperative force. Awareness of the plural 'religions' (both Christian and non-Christian) forced interest in the imagination of a singular, generic 'religion.' As a late example, I take as emblematic of these Renaissance concerns Edward Brerewood's, *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions through the Chiefe Parts of the World* (published, posthumously, in 1614),<sup>8</sup> the second work, as far as I am aware, in the English language to employ the plural 'religions' in its title. There is, as well, a second sense in which Brerewood, now the individual, may be taken as emblematic. Like so many other non-clerical writers on religion prior to the mid-nineteenth century, Brerewood was an *amateur*, publishing not only on languages and religions, but also on antiquities (especially numismatics), mathematics and logic. One may well argue that the subsequent professionalization of religious studies, in concert with other fields undergoing professionalization, gave rise to new disciplinary horizons carrying their own methodological and theoretical interests that were, in the main, by no means peculiar to the study of religion. In particular I think of the claimed *sui generis* nature of a field's object of research, a claim, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially associated with the newly emergent social sciences.

The Renaissance pattern was modified through Enlightenment, counter-Enlightenment and Romantic theories of language and religion, which brings us to the threshold of the modern enterprise of the study of religion — although I will signal, here, only one trajectory of new elements in linguistic theory which was taken over into thinking about religion.

Enlightenment interest in language is a by-product of its preeminent concern for thought and thoughtfulness, an emphasis that must be

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<sup>8</sup> E. Brerewood, *Enquiries Touching the Diversity of Languages and Religions through the Chiefe Parts of the World* (London, 1614). Samuel Purchas, *His Pilgrimage, or, Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages and all Places discovered* (London, 1613) appears to be the earliest English work to employ the plural, 'religions,' in its title.

reaffirmed by any scholar of religion, while prescinding from some of its formulations of this concern. For example, unity and uniformity were revalued as universalism; difference was stigmatized as irrational. Their sometimes vision of an abstract, universal humanity required the imagination of the possibility of an equally abstract, universal language in which all would be transparent, in which decipherment would be superfluous.<sup>9</sup> Language was thus conceived as a secondary tool for the expression of thought, with the development of the former the result of the progressive refinement of the latter. To quote one eighteenth-century authority, language “being entirely the invention of man, must have been exceedingly rude and imperfect at first, and must have arrived by slow degrees at greater and greater perfection, as the reasoning faculties acquired vigour and acuteness.”<sup>10</sup> The only question was whether the perfecting of language was best achieved by controlling the denotation of signs or the regularization of grammar.

The counter-Enlightenment takes the issue of thoughtfulness in a new direction, one as yet insufficiently appropriated by scholars of religion.<sup>11</sup> Language, it was argued, is not a secondary naming or memorializing; it is not a translation of thought, it is not posterior to experience, rather, it is the very way in which we think and experience. The human sciences become conceptually possible largely through the acceptance of the counter-Enlightenment argument that their objects of study are holistic linguistic and language-like systems, and that,

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<sup>9</sup> While a number of complex linguistic issues recur in Enlightenment thought — compare, for example, H. Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis, 1982) and Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England 1780-1860* (Minneapolis, 1983) with L. Formigari, *L'esperienza e il segno: La filosofia del linguaggio tra Illuminismo e Restaurazione* (Rome, 1990) — I focus, here, on the issue of universality, on which see, U. Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> “Language,” *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh, 1771), vol. 3, p. 863.

<sup>11</sup> I have taken the term, ‘counter-Enlightenment’ from I. Berlin. For the linguistic theories here summarized, see esp. Berlin, *The Magus of the North*; J.G. Hamann and *The Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (New York, 1994).

therefore, they are the study of “eminently social” human projects. This gives rise to what was already alluded to at the beginning of my presentation: an insistence that the central debates within the study of religion revolve around the relations of language and experience. Questions as to whether experience can ever be immediate or is always mediated? Whether we can experience a world independently of the conventional ways in which it is socially represented? Whether the *re-* of re-presentation remains always at the level of re-presentation? Such questions constitute the serious theoretical matters that sharply divide us in ways that cut across conventional, essentially political, divisions such as historians of religions and theologians.

For a certain sort of grand theorist in the study of religion, two aspects of Romantic theories of language proved most compelling. First, the reassertion, against the Enlightenment, of the supreme value of uniqueness, singularity, or individuality in the name of the creative, free expression of will. Second, and of greater import, the identification of poetic language, in opposition to the prosaic, as intransitive, as a non-pragmatic, autonomous totality, a thing-in-itself. In such a view, there is no gap between signifier and signified. The counter-Enlightenment’s insistence on the non-secondary character of language has now been transformed into the transparency of self-disclosure. From poetry to myth is but a small step; Schelling, most famously, made the translation:

Each figure in mythology is to be taken for what it is, for it is precisely in this way that it will be taken for what it signifies. The signifying here is at the same time the being itself, it has passed into the object, being one with it. No sooner do we allow these beings to signify something than they are no longer anything themselves . . . Indeed, their greatest attraction lies in the fact that, whereas they only are, without any relation, absolute in themselves, they still allow signification to shine through.

Mythology is not allegorical; it is tautegorical. For mythology, the gods are beings that really exist; instead of being one thing and signifying another, they signify only what they are.

Allegory, one of the prime modes of interpreting myth for more than a millennium, is here dethroned; the hermeneutics of ‘speaking-

otherwise' has given way to the direct apprehension of the Other's speech.<sup>12</sup> Romanticism laid the groundwork for one of the hallmarks of influential twentieth century theories of religion in which a still essentially philological discipline all but ignores modern linguistics, and is often prepared to impeach the status of language in an effort to preserve ontology from anthropology and to maintain the privilege of unmediated, direct experience.

With this much by way of a brief background, let me turn to some implications of locating the history of religions within philology, and of re-situating it within Renaissance and Romantic linguistic thought for both practice and theory.

We may recall, Mircea Eliade's double critique of dominant modes of scholarship on religion, made in the course of a set of reflections on the past and future of the field. As is well-known, for those outside of the history of religions, chiefly in the human sciences, his name for all that he abjured in their work was 'reductionism.' Less famously, Eliade named as his opponents within the field, the 'philologists.' I shall take up these two names from Eliade's execration text in reverse order.

From Eliade's totalizing perspective, the philologically based historians of religions persistently take parts for wholes, thereby giving priority to the local, rather than to the general and typical. His fear was that the preponderance of language-based specialists within the field would result in a situation where, "the History of Religions will be endlessly fragmented and the fragments reabsorbed in the different philologies."<sup>13</sup> To a degree, this has occurred, and has brought with it a

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<sup>12</sup> For Romantic language theories, I have relied primarily on T. Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* (Ithaca, 1982), esp. pp. 147-221. The two passages from Schelling are translated in Todorov, pp. 210 and 163-64. Note that the indebtedness of Schelling to Coleridge's use of the term "tautegorical" (S.T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* [reprint, London, 1913], 136) is acknowledged in a footnote to the latter passage (Schelling, *Introduction à la Philosophie de la mythologie*, V. Jankélévitch, translator [Paris, 1946], vol. 1, p. 238, n.1).

<sup>13</sup> M. Eliade, "Crisis and Renewal in History of Religions," *History of Religions* 5(1965), 17.

new ethos of particularism that challenges the global ambitions which, from time to time, have animated the field. But, more can be said.

There is the sheer effort involved in gaining proficiency, to the best of one's ability, in difficult languages, often first encountered in the course of graduate studies. While such language studies, taken together, constitute one of our major achievements over the past two centuries, their result has been that language instruction consumes a disproportionate amount of time in the training of the historian of religions. As certification in language ability has increasingly come to be the criterion for achieving professional status, other matters, preeminently those associated with mastering the second-order discourse of the field, get pushed to the side. Philology is the vocation; generalization and theory, the avocation. This has led to the wholesale adoption of a sort of common-sense descriptive discourse as a major rhetoric for the work of the field.

It is possible to point to a variety of practices symptomatic of this sort of discourse in which everything is treated as a self-evident instance of ostension. Texts are pointed to, paraphrased, or summarized as if their citation is, by itself, sufficient to guarantee significance. When translation is undertaken, it is without an explicit theory of translation; rather reproduction and verbal congruence are assumed to be values in their own right. Comparisons are limited to those grounded in common genealogy or spatial contiguity.

The ostensive nature of these practices serve a protective role. In each of these, the unity, the integrity of the subject for study is preserved. Like the Mosaic altar, such practices guarantee that the scholar's work will be built of "whole stones," that the injunction, "thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them," (Deuteronomy 27.5-6) has been piously observed; that like the Temple of Solomon, "there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building" (1 Kings 6.7). By means of such practices, the handicraft of the scholar is disguised so as to give the appearance of achieving "a house not made with hands" (Acts 7.48). Such an attitude, as Bakhtin pointed out, has as one of its causes philology's focus on

“dead languages, languages that were by that very fact ‘unities.’”<sup>14</sup> But it comes as well from a deeply held ethos which Karl Mannheim characterized, in his seminal essay on the sociology of knowledge, as a “conservative” ideology, a “right wing methodology,” which tends to use “morphological categories which do not break up the concrete totality of the data of experience, but seek rather to preserve it in all of its uniqueness.” Opposed to this, Mannheim wrote, is “the analytical approach characteristic of parties of the left [which] broke down every concrete totality in order to arrive at smaller, more general units which may then be recombined.”<sup>15</sup> Here, the scholar’s “tools” have indeed been busy with the altar. The result can no longer be thought of as ‘natural’ but rather stands forth, marked as a construction. Whether this fabrication be judged as informative or as a lie, depends not on presumptions of congruence, but on the exercise of a critical intelligence that assesses the cognitive gain or loss made possible by the constructive difference and distance from what Mannheim termed “the concrete totality.” The fabrication is, necessarily, a representation rather than a claimed presence.

I would note as well Mannheim’s description of the analytical approach as seeking “smaller, more general units.” Scholars of religion have made insufficient use of the notion of ‘generalization,’ a neo-Latin coinage, growing out of the Aristotelian taxonomic distinction between genus and species, the latter giving rise to ‘specialization’ as the proper antonym to ‘generalization.’ In handbooks of logic, the ‘general’ is placed in opposition to the ‘universal’ by its admission to significant exceptions. Generalization is understood to be a mental, comparative, taxonomic activity which directs attention to co-occurrences of selected stipulated characteristics while ignoring others. Both of these qualifications, not universal and highly selective, are central to generalization. Indeed, they are frequently exaggerated, leading to the pejorative sense of ‘generality’ as exhibiting vagueness or indeterminacy.

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<sup>14</sup> M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M.M. Bakhtin, ed. M. Holquist (Austin, 1981), 271.

<sup>15</sup> K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1936), 274.

Employed correctly, these same characteristics insure that generalities are always corrigible.<sup>16</sup> By this understanding, our object of interest would then be 'religion' as the general name of a generic anthropological category, a nominal, intellectual construction, surely not to be taken as a 'reality.' After all, there are no existent genera.

It is here that we begin to get an assist from modern linguistic theories. The scholarly imagination of 'religion' as an intellectual category establishes a disciplinary horizon that should play the same sort of role as 'language' in linguistics or 'culture' in anthropology. In each case, the generic category supplies the field with a theoretical object of study, different from, but complimentary to, their particular subject matters. Taking up only the analogy to language, Hans Penner has persistently reminded us of the relevance of the Saussurean project<sup>17</sup> which was undertaken to "show the linguist what he is doing," in conscious opposition to what Saussure termed the "philologies" and languages' "ethnographic aspect[s]."<sup>18</sup> As described by one scholar of language:

Saussure was doubtless one of the first to render explicit, for linguistics, the necessity of accomplishing what Kant terms the Copernican revolution. [Saussure] distinguished the *subject matter* of linguistics, the linguist's field of investigation — which includes the whole set of phenomena closely or distantly related to language use — from its *object* ... The role of general linguistics ... is to define certain concepts that allow us to discern in the particular investigation of any particular language, the object within the subject matter.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to recall that Saussure's distinction between 'language' and 'speech' is maintained, methodologically, by most forms of contemporary linguistics, although there is sharp disagreement as to

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, J.S. Mill, *A System of Logic*, 10th ed. (London, 1879), vol. 2: 127-41, 360-80. A good sense of the semantic range of the term can be gained from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'general,' 'generality,' 'generalization,' 'generalize.'

<sup>17</sup> H.H. Penner, *Impasse and Resolution: A Critique of the Study of Religion* (New York, 1989), esp. pp. 130-134.

<sup>18</sup> F. de Saussure, Letter to A. Meillet (January 4, 1894) as quoted in E. Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics* (Coral Gables, 1971), 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> O. Ducrot and T. Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language* (Baltimore, 1979), 118.

their definitions as well as over the appropriate criteria for distinguishing the empirical subject matter from the theoretical object of research. That is to say, the formulation is both arguable and corrigible. It is this very process of argumentation concerning this object that has resulted in some of the most significant theoretical advances in linguistics.

To come at the same point from a different angle. The field of religious studies has been more persistent than many of its academic neighbors in continuing to maintain one strand of nineteenth century neo-Kantian thought which argued that the distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences was a matter of explanation as opposed to interpretation. The former, in one of its earlier formulations, being understood as privileging the general (through subsumption to law-like statements); the latter, as privileging the individual, or more strongly, the unique. Each was thought to have its own sort of data, its own appropriate subject matter. Far more fruitful is the alternative proposal, from another strand of contemporaneous neo-Kantian thought, that holds these two approaches to be alternative ways of construing the same datum, the same subject matter.<sup>20</sup> In either proposal, the term 'reduction' has come to stand, nowhere more so than in the study of religion, as the ambivalent cipher for this difference, perceived as being highly valued by the natural sciences and abjured by the majority of the human sciences. Such a view — at times raised to the level of an ethical proscription — is, and has been for some time, utterly inadequate.

Both explanations and interpretations are occasioned by surprise. It is the particular subject matter that provides the scholar with an occasion for surprise. Surprise, whether in the natural or the human sciences, is always reduced by bringing the unknown into relations to the known. The process by which this is accomplished, in both the natural and the human sciences, is translation: the proposal that the second-order conceptual language appropriate to one domain (the known/the familiar) may translate the second-order conceptual lan-

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<sup>20</sup> On this issue, see the references in J.Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, 1987), 33-34 and 138-39, notes 48-51.

guage appropriate to another domain (the unknown/the unfamiliar). Perhaps the strongest example of this procedure in the study of religion is Durkheim's translation of the language appropriate to religion (for him, the unknown) into the language appropriate for society (the known). The point at which one may differ from Durkheim's project is with respect to his acceptance of the goal of explanatory simplicity. Better, here, is Lévi-Strauss's formulation: "scientific explanation consists not in a movement from the complex to the simple but in the substitution of a more intelligible complexity for another which is less."<sup>21</sup>

While the adequacy of any translation proposal may be debated, an argument made more difficult by the lack of elaborated theories of translation by scholars of religion, the only grounds for rejecting such a procedure is to attack the possibility of translation-itself, most often attempted through appeals to incommensurability. Such appeals, if accepted, must entail the conclusion that the enterprise of the human sciences is, strictly speaking, impossible.<sup>22</sup>

I would note only two implications of translation. First, translation, as an affair of language, is a relentlessly social activity, a matter of public meaning rather than of individual significance. Here, for the study of religion, the public is, first of all, the academic community and, therefore, a central issue becomes one of specifying the relations between the study of 'religion' and other disciplinary endeavors, a

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<sup>21</sup> C. Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962), 328. Compare the different translation of this sentence in Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966), 248.

<sup>22</sup> For a preliminary account, see R. Feleppa, *Convention, Translation and Understanding: Philosophical Problems in the Comparative Study of Culture* (Albany, 1988). Once again, Hans Penner, reflecting the work of Donald Davidson, persistently urges confidence in the possibility of translation. "To interpret means to translate. The notion then that someone speaks an uninterpretable language is incomprehensible — language entails translatability." H.H. Penner, "Interpretation," in W. Braun and R.T. McCutcheon, eds, *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London-New York), 69. See further, Penner, "Holistic Analysis: Conjectures and Refutations," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62(1994), 977-96; Penner, "Why Does Semantics Matter to the Study of Religion?" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7(1995), 221-49.

matter of locating oneself with respect to one's conversation partners, those with whom one will work out appropriate translation languages. Second, whether of a conceptual or natural language, whether intercultural or intracultural, translation is never fully adequate. To pick up again Schelling's term (borrowed from Coleridge), translation can never be "tautegorical." There is always discrepancy. (To repeat the old tag: "To translate is to traduce".) Central to any proposal of translation are questions as to appropriateness and 'fit,' questions that must be addressed through the double methodological requirement of comparison and criticism.

Indeed, the cognitive power of any translation, model, map, generalization or redescription — as for example in the imagination of 'religion' — is, by this understanding, a result of its *difference* from the subject matter in question and not its congruence. This conclusion has, by and large, been resisted throughout the history of the history of religions. But this resistance has carried a price. Too much work by scholars of religion takes the form of a paraphrase, our style of ritual repetition, which is a particularly weak mode of translation, insufficiently different from its subject matter for purposes of thought. To summarize: a theory, a model, a conceptual category, a generalization cannot be simply the data writ large.

The alternative would be to persist in a view that would make our "twice-told tale" truly tedious, to persist in denying that a science depends on the construction of its theoretical object of study, insisting rather that it is founded on the discovery of a unique reality which eludes any translation other than paraphrase. It is to accede to the odd sort of "tautegorical" claim that last appeared in the 1960-61 description of the History of Religions field at the University of Chicago: "It is the contention of the discipline of History of Religions that a valid case can be made for the interpretation of transcendence as transcendence."<sup>23</sup> This expression, with its implied acceptance of incommensurability, denies the legitimacy of translation, and the

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<sup>23</sup> University of Chicago, The Divinity School, *Announcements for Sessions of 1960-1961* (Chicago, 1960), 3.

cognitive value of difference. It condemns the field to live in the world of Borges's Pierre Menard where a tale must always be identically "twice-told," where a word can only be translated by itself.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jorge L. Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in Borges, *Collected Fictions* (New York, 1998), 88-95.

# ETYMOLOGY AND MAGIC: YĀSKA'S *NIRUKTA*, PLATO'S *CRATYLUS*, AND THE RIDDLE OF SEMANTIC ETYMOLOGIES\*

JOHANNES BRONKHORST

## *Summary*

Semantic etymologies are to be distinguished from historical etymologies. A historical etymology presents the origin or early history of a word. Semantic etymologies do something completely different. They connect one word with one or more others which are believed to elucidate its meaning. Semantic etymologies are practically universal in pre-modern cultures, and there are treatises in some cultures — such as Yāska's *Nirukta* in ancient India, Plato's *Cratylus* in ancient Greece — that specifically deal with them. This article addresses the question how modern scholarship should try to understand semantic etymologizing. It is argued that, being a universal phenomenon, semantic etymologizing is in need of a universal explanation. Drawing inspiration from certain pre-modern philosophies, it is proposed to study this phenomenon in the light of another category of phenomena that is often called “magical”.

## *1.*

Yāska's *Nirukta* and Plato's *Cratylus* are two texts which belong to entirely different cultures (India and Greece respectively) and which deal essentially with one and the same problem. Both try to bring order to a phenomenon which is extremely wide-spread — not only in ancient India and early Greece, but in probably all pre-modern cultures — the phenomenon of what I will call “semantic etymologizing”.

A semantic etymology is to be distinguished from a historical etymology. A historical etymology presents the origin or early history of a word; it tells us, for example, that a word in a modern language is derived from another word belonging to an earlier language, or to an earlier stage of the same language. The English word *militant*, for example, is derived from Latin *militans* through the intermediary

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\* I thank the editors of *Numen* for useful criticism.

of French *militant*. And the Hindi pronoun *main* 'I' is derived from Sanskrit *mayā* through Prakrit *mae* (Oberlies, 1998: 17). Semantic etymologies do something different. They connect one word with one or more others which are believed to elucidate its meaning. The god Rudra, for example, has that name according to the Vedic text called *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.3.10), because he cried (*rud-*) in one story that is told about him. Semantic etymologies tell us nothing about the history of a word, but something about its meaning.

Semantic etymologies have largely gone out of fashion these days. Most sensible people have serious doubts about the possibility of finding the meaning of just any word by comparing it with other, more or less similar words. We tolerate such semantic etymologizing from children, who indulge in it quite freely, as Jean Piaget (1925) and others after him have shown. We are less tolerant with respect to adults who do so; the person who analyzes the word *contentment* as concerning being *content* with *men*, or with *tea* (*content-men-t*), is categorized as schizophrenic by modern investigators, perhaps rightly so.<sup>1</sup>

And yet semantic etymologies are wide-spread in all pre-modern cultures. Here are a few examples from some cultures different from ancient and classical India<sup>2</sup>:

In the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninhursag the former is cured when Ninhursag causes deities to be born corresponding to Enki's sick members: "The correspondence between the sick member and the healing deity rests on the . . . etymologizing of the ancient scribes; the Sumerian word for the sick organ contains at least one syllable in common with the name of the deity. Thus e.g. one of the organs that pained Enki was the 'mouth', the Sumerian word for which is *ka*, and

<sup>1</sup> So Werner and Kaplan (1963: 259), citing a patient of Maria Lorenz (1961: 604).

<sup>2</sup> Several studies collect and discuss semantic etymologies from Vedic and post-Vedic Indian literature, e.g. Balbir, 1991; Bhavasar, 1969; Dange, 1989; Deeg, 1995; Dīksā, 1989; Gonda, 1955; Kahrs, 1998; Kantawala, 1967; 1973; 1993; Mehendale, 1963; Norman, 1980; Schneider, 1954; Shastri, 1997; Simson, 1988; Singh, 1952; Singh, 1994; Tsuji, 1977; Verma, 1991.

the deity created to alleviate this pain is called Ninkasi; similarly, the goddess born to alleviate the pain of the rib, the Sumerian word for which *ti*, is named Ninti, etc.” (Kramer, 1969: 37 n. 13).

An ancient Egyptian text carved inside two pyramids dating from the 24th century “is full of plays on words” such as: “O Atum-Kheprer, . . . thou didst arise (*weben*) as the *ben*-bird of the *ben*-stone in the *Ben*-House in Heliopolis.” (Wilson, 1969: 3). Morenz (1957) refers to many ‘word-plays’ (*Wortspiele*) in Egypt<sup>3</sup> and observes: “Für die alt-orientalischen Hochkulturen darf bemerkt werden, dass im Akkadischen (*amātu*), im Hebräischen (*dâbâr*) und auch im Ägyptischen (*md.t*) derselbe Ausdruck ‘Wort’ und ‘Sache’ bezeichnet” (p. 24). Sauneron (1957: 133 f.) adds further examples and points out that ‘plays on words’ were considered to give an ‘explanation’ of the world.

In the Hebrew Bible etymologies are common, especially in connection with names: Adam is linked with *adama* ‘earth’ (Gen. 2.7); woman, *isha*, is derived from man, *ish* (Gen. 2.23); Cain from *qaniti* ‘I have gotten’ (Gen. 4.1); etc. (Böhl, 1991: 163 f.).

Kirk (1974: 57f.) emphasizes the use of etymologies in Greek myths and states (p. 58): “The poets of the Homeric tradition were already intrigued by the resemblance of the name ‘Odysseus’ to the verb *odussomai* ‘I am angry’. . . . Pytho, the old name for Delphi, is derived [in the *Hymn to Apollo*, probably late in the seventh century B.C.E.] from the serpent destroyed there by Apollo and allowed to rot, *puthein*. . . . Heraclitus found it significant that one word for a bow resembled the word for ‘life’ (*biós* and *bíos*), and Aeschylus related the name of Helen to the idea that she ‘took the ships’ (*hele-naus*), that of Apollo to *apollunai*, ‘destroy’, and that of Zeus to *zên*, ‘live’.” Similar efforts at etymologizing characterize later Greek antiquity.<sup>4</sup>

An example from medieval Europe is provided by the secret spiritual organization of the Fedeli d’Amore, whose representatives were

<sup>3</sup> See further Sander-Hansen, 1946, esp. p. 19 f.

<sup>4</sup> For a study of the etymologies in Homer, see Rank, 1951; also Kraus, 1987: 31 f. For an (incomplete) list of etymologies in Plutarch, see Strobach, 1997: 186 f.

active in France, Italy, and Belgium from the 12th century onward. They used a hidden language in order to keep their mystery of love secret. Love for them is a soteriological means, and accordingly the word *amor* 'love' is interpreted as *a-mor* 'without death':

A senefie en sa partie  
 Sans, et *mor* senefie *mort*;  
 Or l'assemblons, s'aurons *sans mort*.<sup>5</sup>

Caesarius of Heisterbach (ca. 1170-ca. 1240) gives an explanation of the word *mors* 'death' in his *Dialogue on Miracles*:<sup>6</sup>

Through the transgression of the first created, death entered into the world. Hence death (*mors*) received its name from 'biting' (*morsus*). As soon as man bit (*momordit*) the apple of the forbidden tree, he incurred death and subjected himself as well as his whole posterity to its necessity. Death is also said to have come from 'bitterness' (*amaritudine*), because, as it is said, no pain in this life is more bitter than the separation of body and soul. Elsewhere he explains the word *puer* 'boy': "*Puer* ('boy') signifies *purus* ('pure')".<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese language, with its many homonyms, is particularly suited to connect unrelated things that have the same name; the link with what we call semantic etymologizing seems obvious. Indeed, "Han commentators applied a form of correlative thought in their philological studies, frequently explaining the meaning of obscure characters by sound analogy on the assumption that a phonetic correspondence indicated a semantic relation".<sup>8</sup> "Sometimes highly complex circular *shou* emblems [symbols of long life or immortality] had incorporated into their design a swastika (pronounced *wan*), to express by a pun the concept of *wan shou*, meaning 'ten thousand years of long life'." Similarly: "The endless knot [was] interpreted . . . as symbolizing Buddha's intestines (*ch'ang*). . . . [S]ince its name, *ch'ang*, made a pun on the word for long, the whole figure . . . symbolized [to the

<sup>5</sup> See Eliade, 1986: 112.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Zaleski, 1988: 50.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Zaleski, 1988: 52.

<sup>8</sup> Henderson, 1984: 19-20.

later Chinese] a long life ...,"<sup>9</sup> etc. Emperor Wang Mang "had the 'screen-walls' *fu-ssu* of the parks of the Wei and the Yen tombs pulled down, so that the people should not 'think again' *fu-ssu* (of the Han Dynasty)" (Ts'eng Chu-shen, 1949: 126). An example closer to our time is found in the weekly journal *Newsweek* of July 6, 1987, p. 18: "Hong Kong's new British governor, Sir David Wilson, bowed to local tradition by changing his Cantonese name, Ngai Tak-ngai, shortly before assuming office last April. Its characters were homophones for the phrase 'so hypocritical it's dangerous'; his new moniker, Wai Yik-shun, means 'guardianship' and 'trust', conjuring up more soothing images to colony residents ..."

An example from ethnographic records is the following: Among the inhabitants of the Trobriand islands the word *vatuvi* occurs in a magical formula.<sup>10</sup> This word has no grammatical form; it is neither noun nor verb. Malinowski (1935: II: 249, cf. p. 260-61) observes: "the real etymological identity of this word will define it as connected with *vitawo*, or the prefix *vitu-*, and the word *vituvatu*, 'to institute', 'to set up', 'to direct', 'to show'. [It has] also... fortuitous, but magically significant associations with *vatu*, 'coral boulder', 'coral reef', and the more or less real word *va-tuvi*, 'to foment', 'to make heal'."<sup>11</sup>

The word 'etymology' itself has an etymology which presents its meaning as 'discourse that makes known the true meaning of a word', from Greek *etumos* 'true' and *logos* 'word'. In other words, if we had to decide which of the two, historical etymologies or semantic etymologies, should most appropriately be called etymologies, there can be no doubt that the historical linguist would have to search for another term.

<sup>9</sup> Cammann, 1962: 98, 99-100. I thank Ms. Michèle Boin for this and the following reference.

<sup>10</sup> Malinowski (1935: I: 96, II: 257) describes it as the most important formula in all Omarakana garden magic.

<sup>11</sup> Regarding the last association, *va-tuvi*, Malinowski observes (p. 260-61): "As a matter of fact, one or two natives... gave me this explanation of the word when commenting upon the spell." It is not clear whether any native made the association with *vatu* explicit.

## 2.

The omnipresence of semantic etymologies, illustrated above, raises important questions: what do these etymologies mean? what are they supposed to explain and how? why do people invent them?

Yāska's *Nirukta* and Plato's *Cratylus* deal with these and related questions. I will present the positions of these two texts, beginning with the *Nirukta*. After that I will briefly discuss the issue how we, in the 21st century, should deal with these same questions.

First the *Nirukta*. This text is considered a 'limb of the Veda' (*vedāṅga*), one of the auxiliary sciences needed to interpret the Veda. It can approximately be dated on the basis of the following reflections. There is reason to believe that Yāska knew Pāṇini's grammar and must therefore be dated later than that famous grammarian (Thieme, 1935: \*23\*-\*24\* (530-31); Bronkhorst, 1984: 8 f.). The *Nirukta* is known to Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, and is therefore older than that text.<sup>12</sup> The *Mahābhāṣya* was composed in or soon after the middle of the second century before the common era (Cardona, 1976: 266), and Pāṇini appears to belong to the middle of the fourth century before the common era, or to the decennia immediately following it (Hinüber, 1989: 34-35; Falk, 1993: 304). Yāska must fit in between, so that we may date him approximately 250 B.C.E., which is well after most Vedic texts, including the prose portions called Brāhmaṇas, had been composed.

The *Nirukta* tries to make sense of, and bring order into, the semantic etymologizing that is common in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. We will see that in doing so it secularizes and rationalizes this practice. In order to appreciate this procedure, we have to first look at semantic etymologizing as we find it in the Brāhmaṇas:

In etymologizing as we find it in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas the following features can be observed:

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<sup>12</sup> Cp. e.g. Limaye, 1974: 9, 14, 15, 93.

- 1) Etymologies in the Vedic age were more than mere intellectual amusement. Knowing them was believed to be important: it will secure those who know them various advantages.
- 2) There is a close connection between etymologies and myths. Etymological 'explanations' refer, almost without exception, to myths.<sup>13</sup>
- 3) Etymologies often deal with a hidden dimension of linguistic reality: they reveal hidden layers of language.
- 4) The number of etymologies for each word is not confined to just one.<sup>14</sup>

Each of these features could be illustrated with the help of numerous examples. To keep things simple, I will give just one or two examples for each.

*ad* 1) Some passages are quite explicit about the importance and advantage of knowing certain etymologies.<sup>15</sup> The following one is from the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.11.8.7-8; tr. Witzel, 1979: 13):<sup>16</sup>

Prajāpati (the creator god) did not know how to give the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*). He put it in his right hand (*dakṣiṇaḥ*). He took it, speaking the ritual formula (*mantra*): 'For fitness (*dakṣa*) I take you, the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*).' — Therefore he became fit (*adakṣata*). The one who **knowing thus** receives the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*), becomes fit (*dakṣate*).

This passage clearly indicates that the etymological link which supposedly exists between the sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*), the right hand

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<sup>13</sup> One is here reminded of Max Müller's "etymological method" of studying myths. See van den Bosch, 1993: 188 f. In a lecture delivered at the University of Oslo on February 9, 1996, Eivind Kahrs has suggested that Müller may have been influenced by the chapters on divinities of Yāska's *Nirukta*. Something like Müller's method has still been used by some authors in the present century; see Kraus, 1987: 17.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Deeg, 1995: 397 f. The same is true for ancient Greece; see Lallot, 1991: 137 f. Ovid gives at times two etymologies for one word: *At focus a flammis et quod fouet omnia dictus* ("le foyer tire son nom des flammes et du fait qu'il réchauffe tout"; Desbordes, 1991: 155). Various rabbinical etymologies of one and the same word are simultaneously presented; Böhl, 1991: 162.

<sup>15</sup> Cp. Deeg, 1995: 411 f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gonda, 1991: 177.

(*dakṣiṇa*), and fitness (*dakṣa*), **must be known**. This knowledge guarantees that he who knows, having received the sacrificial fee, becomes fit. Etymology is here more than a mere intellectual help to find the meaning of a word; more precisely, it is no such thing at all. Etymologies reveal links between words, and therefore between the objects they denote, links which it is advantageous to know.

*ad 2)* The passage just cited illustrates that etymological explanation usually involves reference to myths. Occasionally it appears that etymologies have given rise to myths.<sup>17</sup> This may be illustrated by *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.6.1.8-9: “Now, the gods and the Asuras, both of them sprung from Prajāpati, were contending. Then all the plants went away from the gods, but the barley plants alone went not from them. The gods then prevailed: by means of these [barley-grains] they attracted to themselves all the plants of their enemies; and because they attracted (*ayuvata*, from *yu*) therewith, therefore they are called *yava* ‘barley’” (tr. Eggeling).

*ad 3)* A hidden layer of language is revealed in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.1.2:<sup>18</sup>

Indra, by his power (*indriya*), kindled those [other] vital airs from the midst; and inasmuch as he kindled (*indh*), he is the kindler (*indha*): the kindler indeed, — him they call ‘Indra’ cryptically, for the gods love the cryptic.<sup>19</sup>

We learn that Indra’s ‘real’ name is Indha, not Indra. We learn from this and many other passages that things and persons (including gods) have a real name which corresponds to their essence. This real name is sometimes hidden, “for the gods love the cryptic”. It seems clear that both the gods themselves and human beings use ‘incorrect’ forms

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Devasthali, 1965: 13 f. Also in ancient Egypt certain myths appear to be based on etymologies; see Malaise, 1983.

<sup>18</sup> See in this connection Charles Malamoud’s article “Les dieux n’ont pas d’ombre: remarques sur la langue secrète des dieux dans l’Inde ancienne”: Malamoud 1989: 241-252, originally published in 1984 (*Traverses* 30-31, p. 86-94).

<sup>19</sup> Deeg (1995: 406 n. 302) points out that these ‘secretive’ etymologies are not confined to Vedic expressions, as had been claimed by Bhavasar in an unpublished doctoral dissertation (Poona, 1969).

such as Indra. Sometimes however the gods are said to use the correct forms, only human beings using incorrect forms. So at *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.4.4: “He takes the skin of a black antelope by means of [the formula] ‘thou art protection, [a bestower of] bliss (*śarman*)’, for *carman* is its name among men, but *śarman* is that used among the gods” (tr. Gonda, 1988: 248).

*ad* 4) Different etymologies of one and the same word (often a name) are frequently met with, sometimes even in one and the same text. A passage from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (10.6.5.5) links the name Aditi to the root *ad*. But another passage from the same *Brāhmaṇa* has an altogether different explanation (7.4.2.7): “Aditi is the earth, for this earth gives (*dadate*) everything here.” Besides the etymology of Indra discussed above (from *indh*), the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.2.10.4) offers an altogether different one: “No one withstood this power (*idam indriyam*) in him. That is why he is called ‘Indra’.” Two different etymologies of one word in one and the same passage occur at *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.1.6.7: “The gods were created on entering the sky; and this is the godhead of the gods (*deva*) that they were created on entering the sky (*div*). Having created them, there was, as it were, daylight from him (i.e. Prajāpati); and this also is the godhead of the gods that, after creating them, there was, as it were, daylight (*divā*) for him” (tr. Eggeling).

Summing up: The etymologies in the *Brāhmaṇas* were believed to bring to light connections between objects that are normally hidden. Similarities between words can reveal those connections. More often than not these connections link the objects concerned with the mythological realm, i.e., with a reality which is not directly accessible to our senses. The fact that multiple etymologies for a single word are frequently met with, suggests that the connections established with their help constitute a network rather than a one to one correspondence. The practical advantage of these etymologies is that they allow man to obtain knowledge about these connections with the hidden reality. This knowledge — the texts emphasize it repeatedly — is of great importance: it can convey a number of advantages to him who knows.

This short résumé shows the extent to which the etymologies of the Brāhmaṇas fit in with other aspects of the religion that expresses itself through these texts. It is not only through etymologies that the Brāhmaṇas establish links with the hidden realm of mythology. And it is not only the knowledge of **etymological** links that is stated to convey numerous advantages. Nor is the idea of a network of connections only noticeable where the Brāhmaṇas present **etymologies**. In short, all the characteristic features that reveal themselves in our study of the etymologies are also found in other aspects of the religion of the Brāhmaṇas.

Similar links are established, not on the basis of verbal similarities, but on the basis of other similarities as well.<sup>20</sup> Michael Witzel (1979: 11 ff.), following Karl Hoffmann (1975-76: II: 524 f.), speaks of ‘noems’ and ‘noematic categories’ to refer to traits that objects may have in common, and which are behind the “identifications” which are so typical for these texts. In the *pravargya* ritual, for example, the glowing red pot is identified with the sun (Witzel, 1979: 2), and the common features between these two objects are easy to guess. In a more recent publication Witzel puts it like this (1996: 169): “The matter may be summarized as follows: any two objects, ideas, entities can be linked with each other by establishing connections of smaller or greater similarity (*bandhu*, *nidāna*) between them. Then they are not only regarded as linked but as essentially ‘identical’ — at least within the framework of the ritual. Whatever is done to one object or entity affects the other. . . . The identifications or homologies can cover a single aspect of the two or three entities involved (even the **number**

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<sup>20</sup> Cp. Brian K. Smith’s (1989: 47) following observation, which sets the tone for his book *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*: “I would suggest here, and will be at pains to prove throughout the remainder of this study, that there is a philosophical center around which all Vedic thought resolves. That center I will call resemblance. [This] *concept*, I believe, underlies Vedic religious and philosophical discourse in its entirety. . . . Universal resemblance, whereby entities, things, forces, activities, cosmic planes — indeed, all the components of the universe as a whole — have essential affinities to related others, helps us to reform our understanding of the Vedic preoccupation with making and finding connections.”

of syllables of the word signifying both entities) or they can cover a larger number of such links. To discover them is the aim of much of the discussion in the Brāhmaṇa style text.”

The following characterization of Vedic thought is found in Brian K. Smith’s *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (1989: 80-81): “Connection thus bring together the immanent and the transcendent in such a way that the inaccessible is made accessible by the play of resemblances, and the manifest is fulfilled by participation in the transcendent. The universal elements, emitted from the Cosmic One, attain their full, actualized reality only when linked one to another and to their point of origin. Such a composition based on connection rejoins the Cosmic One into a unity of parts in which the simple and the limited — while remaining simple and limited — participates in the whole, the unlimited. Each particular ‘name and form’ can realize its true nature only by finding its place in this chain of resemblance — or, rather, by being placed ‘in bondage’ with all of its counterparts under the umbrella of the prototype. Universal resemblance keeps separate while it unifies, its specific economy regulated by avoiding the extremes of identity and individuality.”

Both the notion of “identification” and that of “resemblance” in this connection have been criticized by Albrecht Wezler (1996), who draws attention to the fact that some “identifications” do not connect with the mythical realm, i.e., with the transcendent. Sometimes also an explicit justification is given which has nothing to do with resemblance, but all the more with other factors, such as a causal link, or something else. While Wezler’s cautionary observations may no doubt contribute to a fuller understanding of the texts concerned, there is no reason as yet to doubt that many of these “identifications,” like many of the etymologies, establish a link with the transcendent. Indeed, the fact that resemblance (phonetic resemblance) plays such an important role in the etymologies, is an argument — if such was needed — in support of the importance of resemblance in at least a considerable part of the “identifications.”

The *Nirukta* — it was stated before — tries to make sense of, and bring order into, these etymologies. How does it do so? Here we have to keep in mind that Yāska, being most probably a Vedic Brahmin, could not reject the validity of these etymologies. Their validity was, for him, beyond doubt. His question was rather: how have they been arrived at? and, how does one establish new ones? The fact that he asked these questions and looked for general rules underlying the etymologies of the Brāhmaṇas no doubt betrays Yāska's intellectual distance from the etymologies he tried to understand. It is certainly no coincidence that most of the four features which characterize Vedic etymologizing and which were enumerated above, no longer characterize Yāska's procedure. His etymologies do not typically establish a link with the mythological realm; nor do they as a rule reveal hidden layers of language. They are still secret, but no longer for the concrete reasons given for this in the Brāhmaṇas. The one feature that remains valid for Yāska's etymologies is that there can be several etymologies for one word.

It was pointed out above that the enumerated features of Vedic etymologizing fitted very well into Vedic religion. Etymologizing was just one more way of establishing the links that according to Vedic religious understanding link different objects belonging to this and the other world. Since in Yāska's etymologies the religious dimension (connection with the mythological realm; access to a hidden layer of language) has virtually disappeared, we may conclude that Yāska's religious views were no longer those of the Vedic period. This, however, raises the question what good etymologies would be for him.

A number of rules are formulated in the second chapter of the *Nirukta* to help the student find etymologies on his own.<sup>21</sup> The most important among these rules is no doubt the one that etymologizing should, first of all, be guided by the meaning of the word concerned; phonetic considerations play a less important role: "One should examine [a word] being intent upon [its] meaning, with the help of some similarity in function (with other words). When not even such a simi-

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<sup>21</sup> For a full discussion, see Deeg, 1995: 78 f.

larity is present one should explain on the basis of similarity in a syllable or in a single sound" (*Nirukta* 2.1). In the case of unknown words, therefore, one looks at the context in which they occur (usually a Vedic hymn), so as to get a first impression as to their meaning. Subsequently one looks for other words (they have to be verbal forms, according to the *Nirukta*) which are more or less similar to the word under study. Semantic considerations, however, come first. So a verbal form which is less similar but closer to the expected meaning is to be preferred to a more similar verbal form which does not support the desired meaning. And words which are known to have several meanings, have also several etymologies. An example is the word *go*: "The word *go* is a name for 'earth' because it goes (*gata*) far and because living beings go (*gacchanti*) on it. Or [it is a name] of something<sup>22</sup> which moves (*gāti*). *o* [in *go*] is a nominal suffix. Moreover, [the word *go*] is the name of an animal (viz. 'cow') for this same reason. . . . Also a bow-string is called *go* . . . because it sets arrows in motion (*gamayati*)" (*Nirukta* 2.5). And if one does not find verbal forms that resemble the word to be explained, one should not be discouraged.

The *Nirukta* gives no explanation as to why 'etymologies' should be valid at all. The explanation which has been offered by most modern interpreters of the text, viz., that the 'etymologies' tell us something about the history of the words concerned, is demonstrably incorrect.<sup>23</sup> It appears that the author of the *Nirukta* did not look upon language as something developing in the course of time. This is not surprising in the Indian context; we know that the Veda, and therefore also the language in which it is composed, came to be looked upon as eternal, i.e., without beginning. It is not impossible that this view existed already in the days of the *Nirukta*, i.e., several centuries before the beginning of the Christian era (see above). Classical India, unlike for example classical Greece, could believe in the existence of one 'real' language, all other languages being, at best, imperfect reflections of it.

<sup>22</sup> This interpretation of Sanskrit *gāter vā* follows Eivind Kahrs, 1984: §12; cp. Kahrs, 1998: 115, 132-133.

<sup>23</sup> This is shown in Bronkhorst, 1981; Kahrs, 1983, 1984.

One way to account for the validity of semantic etymologies based on the similarity between words (for those who accept this validity) would be to claim that there are ultimate meaning bearers, such as individual sounds or small groups of them, each with its own specific meaning. Plato's *Cratylus* does indeed explore this possibility, as we will see below. However, the *Nirukta* does not adopt this position.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, a number of early Buddhist texts, while referring to Brahmanic learning, mention the term *akṣaraprabheda* (Pali *akkharappabheda*),<sup>25</sup> which O. Franke (1913: 87 n. 6) translates "Unterscheidung der Silben"; the Pali commentators specify that the reference is to two forms of linguistic analysis, one of them being etymologizing. It seems, therefore, that the idea that individual sounds or syllables have meanings of their own, and that this presumed fact explains semantic etymologies, was not unknown in ancient India, even though the *Nirukta* does not mention it.

The grammarian Patañjali (2nd century B.C.E.), the most authoritative commentator on Pāṇini's grammar, considers and subsequently rejects the proposal that individual sounds have meanings.<sup>26</sup> Among the reasons he adduces — following his predecessor Kātyāyana, whose statements (*vārttika*) he comments — is the following: In grammatical derivations there can be transposition, loss, addition and modification of sounds. If sounds had meanings, these meanings, too, would undergo transposition, loss, addition and modification. Such is not however the case. This argumentation is of particular interest, for Yāska's *Nirukta* (2.1-2) had presented almost exactly the same reasons in order to show that in etymologizing one is free to transpose, remove, add or modify sounds. This proves that — in the opinion of their practi-

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<sup>24</sup> It does occasionally present 'deep' forms which 'hide' behind the surface forms; e.g. Nir. 1.1: *te nigantava eva santo nigamanān nighaṇṭava ucyanta ity aupamanyav[ah]* "According to Aupamanyava, these [lists of words] are called *nighaṇṭus*, being really *nigantus* because they are quoted (*nigamanāt*)."

<sup>25</sup> See Bronkhorst, 1989: 129 f.

<sup>26</sup> *Mahābhāṣya*, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-1885, vol. I p. 30-32.

tioners — neither etymologizing nor grammar could possibly arrive at meanings of individual sounds.<sup>27</sup>

This does not mean that the idea of “real” meanings attaching to individual sounds was abandoned by all in ancient India. A different attitude towards language, and towards sacred utterances in particular, manifests itself in the religious literature of India. This different attitude is interested in the deeper — some would say: mystical — meaning of these utterances. Already the Vedic texts sometimes ascribe significances to parts of words that have nothing to do with their ordinary meanings. For example, the three syllables of the word *pu-ru-ṣa* ‘person, self’ are stated to correspond to a threefold division of the self: to be placed in the world of the sacrificer, in the world of the immortal(?) and in the heavenly world respectively (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.46 (15.2)). The three syllables of *hṛ-da-yam* ‘heart’ are explained as follows: “*hṛ* is one syllable. Both his own people and others bring (*hṛ*) offerings unto him who knows this. *da* is one syllable. Both his own people and others give (*dā*) unto him who knows this. *yam* is one syllable. To the heavenly world goes (*eti* [pl. *yanti*]) he who knows this.”<sup>28</sup> The 36,000 syllables of 1000 *br̥hatī* hymns correspond to as many days of a hundred years, according to the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (2.2.4). The seventeen syllables of the utterances *o śrāvaya*, *astu śrauṣaṭ*, *yaja*, *ye yajāmahe* and *vaṣaṭ* are the seventeenfold god Prajāpati (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 12.3.3.3).

More detailed are two passages from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. The word *satyam* ‘truth’ is said to consist of three syllables *sa-tī-yam*;<sup>29</sup> *sa(t)* is the immortal, *tī* the mortal, with *yam* the two are restrained (root *yam-*) (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.3.5). The three syllables of *ud-gī-*

<sup>27</sup> An exception must of course be made for such verbal roots and other grammatical elements as consist of just one sound.

<sup>28</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.3; tr. Hume.

<sup>29</sup> *tī* is the dual of *ti*, as Keith (1909: 207) pointed out. The analysis *sat-tī-yam* is also found in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.5.1, *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* 2.1.5. For another explanation of *satyam* (= *sat* + *tyam*), see *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.3, *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 1.6, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.6; further Kudelska, 1995.

*tha* ‘chanting of the Sāmaveda’ mean respectively ‘breath’ — because by it one stands up (*uttiṣṭhati*) —, ‘speech’ (*gīr*), and ‘food’ — in which all this is established (*sthita*) — (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 1.3.6). The second of these two analyses tries to keep contact with the ‘real’ meanings of the syllables concerned, the first one does not even try to do so.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* contains a story (5.2) that is interesting in the present context. The gods, men and the demons dwelt with father Prajāpati as students of sacred knowledge. Asking for instruction, Prajāpati uttered the same syllable *da* to each of them. The gods understood this as *dāmyata* ‘restrain yourself’, the men as *datta* ‘give’, while the demons understood this same syllable *da* as *dayadhvam* ‘be compassionate’. The divine voice which is thunder repeats the same: *da da da*, which is: *dāmyata*, *datta*, *dayadhvam*. Therefore one should practice restraint (*dama*), liberality (*dāna*) and compassion (*dayā*). Unfortunately the passage does not explain what is the point of this story, and perhaps one should not attach too much significance to it. It may however be legitimate to surmise that it attributes three different meanings to the single syllable *da*, meanings which normally express themselves through the intermediary of the words *dāmyata* (or *dama*), *datta* (or *dāna*) and *dayadhvam* (or *dayā*).<sup>30</sup>

Concern with single syllables may also be visible in the explanation of the word *śarkara* ‘pebble’ with the help of the syllable *śam* ‘welfare’: *śarkara* is called thus, while welfare (*śam*) befell us.<sup>31</sup>

An early indication that individual speech sounds were looked upon as possessing powers may be found, according to Thieme (1985), in the last verse of the *Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā*, which is also the first verse of the Śaunakīya recension of the *Atharvaveda*. This verse reads:<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Cp. Houben, 1997: 70.

<sup>31</sup> *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.3.7: *śam vai no ‘bhūd iti/ tac charkarāṇām śarkarat-vam/*.

<sup>32</sup> *Maitrāyaṇīya Saṃhitā* 4.12.1 (ed. von Schroeder p. 179 l. 14 f.) ~ *Atharvaveda* (Śaunakīya) 1.1 ~ *Atharvaveda* (Paippalāda) 1.6: *yé trisaptāḥ pariyānti viśvā rūpāṇi bibhrataḥ/ vācāspātir bālā tēṣām tan(ú)vò ‘dyā dadhātu me//* tr. Thieme. Doubts

“The thrice seven that go around, wearing all the shapes — let the Lord of Speech put their powers into my body’s [parts] today.” Thieme argues that ‘the thrice seven’ are the sounds of language and shows how they can, and may have been, looked upon as constituting a list of 21 elements. He then concludes (p. 565 (938)): “The basic sound units of the sacred language, amounting to the sacred number ‘thrice seven’, are the basic sacred elements of the sacred language. Being sacred, they are loaded with magic powers. Rehearsing them the brahmacārin will not only obtain the technical ability of correctly repeating and retaining what his teacher recites to him, he will, also, appropriate those magic powers: ‘May the Lord of Speech put their powers into my body’s [parts] (or: in my body) today (i.e., at the beginning of my vedic studies)’.”

These examples from Vedic literature<sup>33</sup> point the way to a much more wide-spread concern with the deeper significance of small groups of sounds, and even individual sounds. It manifests itself in the speculative analyses of the sacred syllable *om* and elsewhere, and reaches its apogee in certain Tantric texts, which attribute a specific metaphysical significance to every sound of the Sanskrit language.<sup>34</sup> These Tantric

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regarding Thieme’s interpretation of this verse have been raised by Deshpande (1997: 33 f.).

<sup>33</sup> Similar examples can be found in more recent literature. The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.1.6-7; cited and translated in Jacobsen, 1999: 26-27) explains the word *prakṛti* in two ways, the second one dividing the word into the three syllables *pra-kṛ-ti*: “The *pra*-word means the most excellent *sattva guṇa*, *kṛ* means the middle *rajas guṇa*, and *ti* denotes the *tamas guṇa*. She whose own nature is *triguṇa*, is endowed with powers. She is superior in creating, therefore she is called *prakṛti*.” (*guṇe sattve prakṛṣṭe ca pra-śabdo vartate śrutah/ madhyame rajasi kṛś ca ti-śabdas tamasi smṛtaḥ/ triguṇātmasvarūpā yā sā ca śaktisamanvitā/ pradhānā sṛṣṭikaraṇe prakṛtis tena kathiyate//*).

<sup>34</sup> See Padoux, 1990. These Tantric developments are not without precursors in Vedic literature. See, for example, the following passage from the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* (= *Tāṇḍya Mahā Brāhmaṇa*) (20.14.2) and *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.244; close to, but not identical with it): “Prajāpati alone was here. Vāc alone was his own; Vāc was second to him. He reflected, ‘Let me send forth this Vāc. She will spread forth, pervading all this.’ He sent forth Vāc. She spread forth, pervading all this. She

speculations present, in a way, the Indian counterpart of Plato's 'primary names' and the 'primary sounds' of the Stoics, to be discussed below. Yet there is a major difference. These Tantric speculations base themselves primarily on so-called *bīja-mantras*, utterances which are usually devoid of ordinary meaning. The metaphysical meanings assigned to the individual sounds are not, therefore, meant to contribute to the meanings of ordinary words that contain them. No longer restrained by the shackles of ordinary language use, the Tantric authors could establish the meanings of all the sounds of the Sanskrit language.<sup>35</sup>

It will be clear that these Tantric speculations are far removed from the etymologies which form the subject matter of this study. We will not, therefore, study them in any detail. Be it however noted that these Tantric speculations have parallels in the Jewish Kabala and similar developments within Islam.<sup>36</sup> Yet, though removed from etymologies, these speculations cannot be completely separated from them. They are, in a way, the ultimate outcome of the process of analysis which found its inspiration in those etymologies.

Where does this leave us with regard to the question as to how Indian thinkers explained semantic etymologies? During the Vedic period the validity of these etymologies was not questioned since they were based on the more general principle, not confined to language, that similar things are connected — or even identical — with each other. During the then following period this justification fell away, but

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extended upwards as a continuous stream of water. [Uttering the sound] *a*, he split off a third of it — that became the earth . . . [Uttering the sound] *ka* he split off a [second] third — that became the midregions . . . [Uttering the sound] *ho* he cast [the last] third upwards — that became the heaven." (tr. Holdrege, 1994: 44). The context provides no clue as to why exactly these sound have the effect described.

<sup>35</sup> See Padoux, 1990: 235 ff.; Ruegg, 1959: 108 f.

<sup>36</sup> For the Jewish Kabala, see G. Scholem, 1983: 55-99 ("Le nom de Dieu ou la théorie du langage dans la Kabale; mystique du langage"); for Sufism, see Schimmel, 1975: 411 ff. ("Letter symbolism in Sufi literature"). Staal (1979: 7) briefly refers to the parallelism between Kabala and the Tantric speculations under consideration.

people went on etymologizing. No satisfactory theoretical justification was however worked out, even though the idea that constituent syllables or sounds somehow possess meanings that account for the meaning of the whole word survived in various forms.

3.

The situation in ancient Greece is rather different from India, in that the Greeks and their successors did not look upon their language as the only true language.<sup>37</sup> This complicated matters considerably, and it is not impossible that this fact is partly responsible for the relatively suspicious way in which the problem was often approached in the Western tradition. Yet there is a respectable list of thinkers who occupied themselves with it.<sup>38</sup>

Plato's *Cratylus* is the first full investigation of 'etymologies' that has survived. In this dialogue Socrates is engaged in a discussion with two other characters, Cratylus and Hermogenes. It is possible, but not certain, that Cratylus in real life represented an 'etymologist'; it seems however certain that the 'etymological' point of view did have real supporters. Plato's dialogue, i.e., the person of Socrates in it, initially seems to support it, but in the process of working it out in detail changes position.

The basic question discussed in the dialogue is whether "everything has a right name<sup>39</sup> of its own, which comes by nature" (383a). Arguing that this is the case, Socrates is led to conclude that the initial lawgivers knew "how to embody in the sounds and syllables that name which is fitted by nature for each object" (389b). Astyanax 'Lord of the city', for example, being the name of the son of Hector the ruler of Troy, is appropriate (392d-e) or, as he says earlier (385b f.), *true*. This example takes us right into the analysis of words in view of determining their

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<sup>37</sup> Note that right at the beginning of Plato's dialogue of that name, Cratylus is presented as holding the view "that there is a kind of inherent correctness in names, which is the same for all men, both Greeks and barbarians" (383a).

<sup>38</sup> See Kraus, 1987; Lallot, 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Rijlaarsdam (1978: 65 f.) discusses the use of the word 'name' (*ónoma*).

appropriateness. This analysis does not however have to fit the word too closely. It doesn't matter if a letter is added or subtracted (393d). "Varieties in the syllables is admissible, so that names which are the same appear different to the uninitiated, just as the physicians' drugs, when prepared with various colours and perfumes, seem different to us, though they are the same, but to the physician, who considers only their medicinal value, they seem the same, and he is not confused by the additions. So perhaps the man who knows about names considers their value and is not confused if some letter is added, transposed, or subtracted, or even if the force of the name is expressed in entirely different letters. So, for instance, in the names we were just discussing, Astyanax and Hector, none of the letters is the same, except *t*, but nevertheless they have the same meaning." (394a-b). "We often put in or take out letters, . . . and we change the accent" (399a). Originally the true nature of words was more easily recognizable, but people attach "more importance to euphony than to truth" (404d), they beautify names (408b), they add sounds merely for the sake of euphony (412e), to make the words prettier (417e), they "care nothing for the truth, but only for the shape of their mouths" (414d). "The original words have before now been completely buried by those who wished to dress them up, for they have added and subtracted letters for the sake of euphony and have distorted the words in every way for ornamentation or merely in the lapse of time" (414c); "they keep adding to the original words until finally no human being can understand what in the world the word means" (414d). In brief, "words get twisted in all sorts of ways" (421d). The ancient language, on the other hand, shows clearly the real sense of words (418b). It is also clear that "when anyone knows the nature of the name — and its nature is that of the thing — he will know the thing also, since it is like the name" (435d-e). It is striking to see that the factors specified in the *Nirukta* as to be taken into consideration in etymologising (transposition, loss, addition and modification of sounds) are found here, too.

The *Cratylus* contains a great number of practical examples of 'etymologies'.<sup>40</sup> For our present purposes it is not necessary to discuss these in detail. It is more interesting to see how Plato, through Socrates, faces the problem of the multitude of languages. Greek is for him not the only language, nor indeed the only correct, or even the best language. The creators of other languages are clearly assumed to have taken equally great care to make names in those other languages 'fit' their respective objects. The ideal names are expressed differently in different languages: "Then, my dear friend, must not the lawgiver also know how to embody in the sounds and syllables that name which is fitted by nature for each object? Must he not make and give all his names with his eye fixed upon the absolute or ideal name, if he is to be an authoritative giver of names? And if different lawgivers do not embody it in the same syllables, we must not forget this ideal name on that account; for different smiths do not embody the form in the same iron, though making the same instrument for the same purpose, but so long as they reproduce the same ideal, though it be in different iron, still the instrument is as it should be, whether it be made here or in foreign lands. . . . On this basis, then, you will judge the lawgiver, whether he be here or in a foreign land, so long as he gives to each thing the proper form of the name, in whatsoever syllables, to be no worse lawgiver, whether here or anywhere else" (389d-390a). The result of this is that the 'etymological' method can be applied to other languages too: "if foreign names are examined, the meaning of each of them is equally evident" (400b-c). However, "if we should try to demonstrate the fitness of [foreign] words in accordance with the Greek language, and not in accordance with the language from which they are derived, you know we should get into trouble" (409e). Socrates admits however that where he finds it hard to understand a word and its 'etymology', he applies the contrivance of claiming it to be of foreign origin (416a).

The discussion of this device induces Socrates to take his investigation even further than heretofore, and it is this continued investigation which provides him with one of the arguments because of which he

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<sup>40</sup> They have been collected and systematized in Gaiser, 1974: 54-57.

turns in the end against 'etymologies'. His train of thought runs as follows: "If a person asks about the words by means of which names are formed, and again about those by means of which those words were formed, and keeps on doing this indefinitely, he who answers his questions will at last give up. . . Now at what point will he be right in giving up and stopping? Will it not be when he reaches the names which are the elements of the other names and words? For these, if they are the elements, can no longer rightly appear to be composed of other names" (421d-422a). This gives rise to a question: "How can the earliest names, which are not as yet based upon any others, make clear to us the nature of things, so far as that is possible, which they must do if they are to be names at all?" (422d-e). The answer proposed by Socrates is that "the name-maker grasps with his letters and syllables the reality of the things named and imitates their essential nature" (424a-b). Socrates admits that "it will seem ridiculous that things are made manifest through imitation in letters and syllables" (425d); yet there is no alternative, unless we were to believe that the gods gave the earliest names, or that we got the earliest names from some foreign folk and the foreigners are more ancient than we are, or resort to some other evasive tactic (425d-e). Socrates therefore proceeds to assign meanings to individual letters; it would take us too far to give a detailed account of his results, but the principle is simple: the phonetic nature of a sound corresponds to the object it denotes, the active sound *rho*, for example, expresses activity. By combining these individual letters, the lawgiver makes by letters and syllables a name for each and every thing, and from these names he compounds all the rest by imitation (427c).

Having reached this far, Socrates discovers an insufficiency in the view propounded, which he uses as one of his arguments against it: "If the name is like the thing, the letters of which the primary names are to be formed must be by their very nature like the things" (434a). But not infrequently a word contains sounds which have no right to be there, such as the sound *lambda*, which expresses softness, in the word *sklēróiēs* 'hardness' (434d). One might of course argue that this is an added sound which does not really belong in this word, but

this raises the question how it got there. The answer can only be 'by custom' or 'by convention', but this takes us back to the position which was intended to be refuted in the first place, viz., that the relationship between words and their objects is determined by convention. Socrates concludes: "I myself prefer the theory that names are, so far as is possible, like the things named; but really this attractive force of likeness is, as Hermogenes says, a poor thing, and we are compelled to employ in addition this commonplace expedient, convention, to establish the correctness of names" (435c).

One of the things to be noted in this dialogue is the desire to identify the ultimate elements of language and their meanings. Indeed, Socrates turns against the position of Cratylus precisely because his attempt to connect the primary names with the things denoted does not succeed.

In contrasting the *Cratylus* with the *Nirukta* and with Indian etymologising in general, several important differences deserve our attention. It has already been pointed out that the Greeks did not look upon their language as the only true language. To this must be added that Plato speaks about words as having been created by a or several lawgivers ("with the dialectician as his supervisor"; 390d), which is in total contrast with the Indian conception of things. Indeed, the grammarian Patañjali (introduced above) made the famous, and opposite, observation that no one who is in need of words would go to a grammarian the way someone in need of a pot goes to a potter to have one made.<sup>41</sup> The idea of words being made by anyone, human or superhuman, was totally unacceptable in India. For Plato, on the other hand, it is fundamental. What is more, the original name-givers were no ordinary persons (401b), and the suggestion is made that he who gave the first names to things (here the singular is used) is more than human (438c). The name-givers are sometimes called *demiourgos* (431e), and it is not impossible that Plato looked upon the original name-giver as close to, or identical with, the Demiurge, the maker of this world mentioned in some other dialogues (esp. *Timaeus*). This link is particularly interesting in that it connects etymologising with cosmology, a connec-

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<sup>41</sup> *Mahābhāṣya*, ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-1885, vol. I p. 7-8.

tion that came to play a role in the thought of later Platonic thinkers, as we will see below.

I will not pursue the further development of semantic etymologizing in classical Europe. The Stoics actively practiced it, as did the Alexandrian tradition of grammarians. The situation in European antiquity came to be somewhat complicated by the fact that some ideas about the development of one language out of another one came to be accepted. Latin, in particular, was often thought of as having derived from Greek. Myths, such as the one about the origin of the founders of Rome, supported this belief (Strobach, 1997: 85). When, therefore, an author like Plutarch derives Latin words from Greek words, he may intend his etymologies to be understood as histories of the words concerned. Whether all his etymologies are to be understood in this manner remains unclear (Strobach, 1997: 55 ff.). There can however be no doubt that texts like Plato's *Cratylus* deal with semantic etymologising, not with historical etymologies.

I think we are entitled to conclude from the above observations that early Indian and classical European thinkers were aware of some of the difficulties surrounding semantic etymologies. The author of the *Nirukta* tries to formulate the rules that permit us to obtain valid semantic etymologies, but does not feel free to doubt their validity. The author of the *Cratylus*, on the other hand, arrives at the conclusion that the validity of semantic etymologies almost inescapably implies that individual sounds have each their own meaning. Since he finds this difficult to accept, he raises doubts as to the validity of such etymologies.

#### 4.

For us, modern researchers, the validity of semantic etymologies is no longer an issue: semantic etymologies are not generally valid. Neither Yāska's method nor Plato's speculations as to the meanings of individual sounds are acceptable to us. We are nevertheless confronted with the problem that many people apparently did accept these etymologies as valid, and our problem is to make sense of *that*.

Two directions are open to us. On the one hand, we can try to understand semantic etymologies against the background of their respective cultures; in other words, Indian semantic etymologies are to be explained in terms of Indian culture, Greek semantic etymologies in terms of Greek culture, and so on. Alternatively, we can see in semantic etymologies a universal phenomenon, not inherently linked to any particular culture, and therefore look for a universal explanation. The examples adduced in the preceding pages should have left no doubt that semantic etymologizing is indeed a universal phenomenon, which is in need of a universal explanation. However, before turning to it we will have to pay attention to the one serious attempt that has been made to understand Indian semantic etymologies as an Indian phenomenon.

Eivind Kahrs' recent study called *Indian Semantic Analysis: The 'nirvacana' tradition* (1998) presents a new and interesting hypothesis concerning semantic etymologies in classical India, not primarily Vedic etymologies. For Kahrs, etymologies are part of the Indian universe of discourse. That is to say, etymologies are part of the methods used in Indian culture to interpret its texts. The study of etymologies in India is therefore the investigation of a systematically applied means of interpretation (p. 9). By finding here patterns that are repeated over and over again, one may detect certain basic features of classical Indian traditions. "For the present investigation" — Kahrs states on p. 11 — "it is precisely the constant factors and the indigenous interpretations of them at various points in time which are of interest".

Kahrs' study concentrates, as far as etymologizing is concerned, on the *Nirukta*, and on some Śaiva texts from medieval Kashmir. These texts use etymologizing as a conscious device. Briefly put, Kahrs claims (p. 174) that "it is possible to argue that ultimately all *nirvacanas* (= semantic etymologies, JB) are to be understood according to a substitutional model".

Chapter 4 ("The universe of Yāska") deals in great detail with the various ways in which *nirvacanas* are presented in the *Nirukta*. The most important ones of these, Kahrs argues on the basis of copious material, use essentially a genitive case ending. The most perfect way of presentation is of the type *megho mehatīti sataḥ*, which literally

means: “*megha* (‘cloud’) is of something really existing such that one can say [of it]: *mehati* ‘it rains’.” The genitive ending finds expression in the word ‘of’ of the translation.

The next question is: what is the exact meaning of this use of the genitive? What does it mean to say that the word *megha* is of something of which one can say ‘it rains’ (*mehati*)? The most straightforward interpretation might seem to be that the word *megha* belongs to something, viz. a cloud, of which one can say that it rains. This would seem to make perfect sense. Yet Kahrs does not seriously consider this possibility. He rather translates phrases like this in the following manner: “*megha* is in the meaning of that which really exists so that one says [of it]: ‘it rains’” (p. 162; my emphasis). Yāska, according to Kahrs, employs a genitive to indicate a substitution procedure as well as to indicate that which is signified by a word and thus ultimately its synonym. The substitutional model, mentioned earlier, is thus based on a particular interpretation of the genitive. Is this a regular interpretation of the genitive in Sanskrit?

Kahrs claims it is. This kind of use of the genitive ending is called *sthānaṣaṣṭhī* in Sanskrit grammatical literature. Kahrs believes that it is firmly rooted in ordinary Sanskrit (p. 234). He comes to the conclusion “that the usage of the *sthānaṣaṣṭhī* is a well established feature of ordinary language” (ibid.). “It is evident” — he states on the same page — “that you could get the usage of the *sthānaṣaṣṭhī* from the Sanskrit language itself”. And again, one page earlier (p. 233): “Such a usage of the genitive is in accordance with established Sanskrit usage.”

This all sounds rather favourable to Kahrs’s main thesis. All that remains to be done, one would think, is cite some passages from classical or Vedic literature that show that such a usage of the genitive is indeed well established in Sanskrit. No attempt is however made to prove the point, so often repeated, that the substitutional use of the genitive is well established Sanskrit usage. The reason is easy to guess. The genitive of substitution may not be all that well established in Sanskrit.

An exception has to be made for grammatical literature. Pāṇini’s grammar, in particular, uses the genitive in this way. Kahrs rightly

points out that “to interpret a genitive as a substitutional genitive is nothing remarkable in Sanskrit grammatical literature” (p. 236). Then, however, he continues: “Nor is there anything . . . which restricts such a usage of the genitive to grammatical texts.” This is far from obvious. The substitutional genitive in grammar is a technical device which, like most other technical devices of grammar, is most unlikely to be valid anywhere else. Pāṇini’s grammar uses a number of technical terms and devices, which are properly introduced, and which claim no validity outside this grammar. The special use of the genitive is just one of such devices. It is introduced in sūtra 1.1.49 (*ṣaṣṭhī sthāneyogā*), which means, in Böhtlingk’s translation: “Der Genitiv in einem Sūtra bezeichnet dasjenige, an dessen Stelle Etwas treten soll.” The use of the genitive in Pāṇini’s grammar is therefore special, and should not, one would think, be used to elucidate the use of the genitive in other works.

Kahrs does not agree. He discusses in detail the portion of Patañjali’s commentary (the *Mahābhāṣya*) on this sūtra of Pāṇini, as well as the subcommentaries thereon, and finds there an argument which, in his opinion, “would not work were not the use of the *sthānaṣaṣṭhī* firmly rooted in the usage of ordinary Sanskrit” (p. 234). This, and only this, makes him conclude “that the usage of the *sthānaṣaṣṭhī* is an established feature of ordinary language”. This conclusion, which is vital to Kahrs’s thesis, depends therefore, not on an attestable feature of the Sanskrit language, but on the correct interpretation of a scholastic argument, and on nothing else.

Which is the argument which leads Kahrs to his conclusion? It is essentially this. Patañjali points out that the genitive case ending can have “one hundred meanings, or as many as there are,” and that therefore sūtra 1.1.49 **restricts**, for Pāṇini’s grammar, the meaning of the genitive ending to the single meaning “that in the place of which something will be substituted” (p. 197). Kahrs is of the opinion that the sūtra can only **restrict** the meaning in this manner, if the meaning “that in the place of which something will be substituted” does already belong to the genitive ending. Normally the genitive ending expresses

this meaning as well as all the other ones, but as a result of sūtra 1.1.49 only this meaning remains.

Since this part of Patañjali's comments — which follow a vārtika by Kātyāyana — sets the tone for the then following discussion, it is important to understand it correctly. According to Kahrs these comments presuppose that the genitive covers, of its own, the substitutional meaning. From a purely logical point of view he is right. Logically speaking, the substitutional meaning must be one of the hundred meanings, "or as many as there are", that Patañjali assigns to the genitive case ending. But this is not the same as concluding that the substitutional genitive is a well established feature of Sanskrit in general. The general meaning of the genitive case ending is relation in general, more precisely: everything that remains after specifying the meanings of the other case endings (P. 2.3.50: *ṣaṣṭhī śeṣe*). Kahrs describes it as follows (p. 237): "*A[ṣṭādhyāyī]* 2.3.50 *ṣaṣṭhī śeṣe* teaches that a genitive case ending is introduced to denote 'the rest' (*śeṣa*). According to the *Kāśikāvṛtti* this rest is any relation, *sambandha*, which is not a *kāraka*-relation and different from the meaning of the nominal stem. In other words, a genitive case suffix is introduced to denote any relation sustained between entities, that is to say, any non-verbal relation in general, such as father-son, master-servant, part-whole, etc. The fact that two entities are mutually related by their appearance in a given context is expressed by the genitive case. But the particular type of relation is not specified." This, of course, includes an enormous lot. It includes, for example, the sense "uncle of", and in certain exceptional circumstances the Sanskrit equivalent of "John is of Mary" or "John belongs to Mary" will have to be interpreted as meaning "John is Mary's uncle". This is not however the same as saying that the meaning "uncle of" for the genitive case ending is a well established feature of the Sanskrit language. The situation is not different, as far as I can see, for the substitutional meaning of the genitive case ending. There is just no evidence that this meaning is a regular feature of Sanskrit. This does not change the fact that this meaning, like the meaning "uncle of", is somehow included in the hundred or more cases covered by the genitive.

It is interesting, but also somewhat puzzling, that Kahrs seems to agree with this conclusion. He cites (p. 238 ff.) the example *devadattasya yajñadattaḥ* “Devadatta’s Yajñadatta”, where the idea is that Yajñadatta is the son of Devadatta. He compares this with the grammatical rule (2.4.52) *aster bhūḥ* “of *as*, *bhū*”. Then he remarks (p. 238): “Just what the relation is . . . **can not be known from the statement *aster bhūḥ* alone**, anymore than one knows from the statement *devadattasya yajñadattaḥ* just what relation obtains between Devadatta and Yajñadatta. But if *yajñadattaḥ* is replaced by an obvious relational term such as *putraḥ* ‘son’, the relation in question is immediately understood: Devadatta’s son. Now, in the case of *aster bhūḥ*, where *bhū* itself is no obvious relational term, the relation marked by the genitive is determined by the expression *sthāne* which defines the genitive [in Pāṇini’s grammar]. [The rule *aster bhūḥ*,] then, teaches that *bhū* occurs in the *sthāna* of *as* in certain contexts. . .” Kahrs even refers to Nāgeśa’s position, according to which *sthāna* is **not a meaning of the genitive case**; it rather conditions the relation which is the meaning of the genitive case (pp. 241 f.). He concludes on p. 248: “I think it proper to accept what Kaiyaṭa and Nāgeśa say, which also Annambhaṭṭa says: the *sthāna* is called a *sambandha* ‘relation’ metaphorically, because it is a necessary condition for the relation in question. Note that I have accepted what most Pāṇinīyas say, namely that **the *sthāna* is not itself a *sambandha* and thus not something directly conveyed by the genitive ending . . .**” (my emphasis).

And yet, in the Epilogue (p. 268-269) the old position is back into place: “. . . there is nothing remarkable in interpreting a genitive as a substitutional genitive in the context of relations between linguistic elements. . . . Nor is there anything in the discussions of A[ṣṭādhyāyī] 1.1.49 *ṣaṣṭhī sthāneyogā* and the *nirdiśyamāna-paribhāṣā* which prohibits such an interpretation **within or without the boundaries of *vyākaraṇa***. . . . the substitutional use of the genitive is part of the Sanskrit language so that any genitive in a suitable context could be interpreted in such a way” (my emphasis).

It should be clear that it is possible to have serious doubts with regard to the thesis that ultimately all Indian semantic etymologies are

to be understood according to a substitutional model. Kahrs himself has such doubts. Towards the end of his book he makes the following remarks (p. 278): “In the light of the technical framework of the *Nirukta* it is of course also possible to adopt a different model for the interpretation of *nirvacanas*. On the view that the *-teḥ* and *-eḥ* forms are ablatives one would simply face statements that single out the verbal element which underlies the grammatical formation and identify the action or event considered the reason for a particular name. This is a possibility also if they are considered genitive forms, and it is no longer crucial to determine which case ending we are dealing with.” He then adds that perhaps this model and the substitutional model are both simultaneously valid. Perhaps, but one cannot avoid the conclusion that the problem of the Indian semantic etymologies is not definitely solved with the help of the substitution model.

## 5.

It appears, then, that semantic etymologizing is a universal (human) phenomenon which is in need of a universal explanation. In order to make progress in this direction, we may observe that there is a shared element between semantic etymologies and so-called magical acts which are of almost universal occurrence in human societies.<sup>42</sup> Both may be looked upon as expressions of the *analogical* mode of thought, to borrow a term from the anthropologist S.J. Tambiah. Both in etymologies and in magical acts (or what are often referred to as such) similarity frequently plays a determining role. It must suffice here to cite Evans-Pritchard’s (1976: 177) following remark

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<sup>42</sup> Some authors (e.g. Brian K. Smith, 1989: 36 f.) object against the use of the word *magic*, claiming that this term indicates utter foreignness and difference of the activities concerned, that it distinguishes them from proper religion, that it emphasizes their problematic nature, etc. None of this is here intended. No claim is here made that there is such a thing as magic, or that the term has been, or can be, meaningfully used. The word has however often been used in academic literature in connection with activities that show some kind of similarity with the etymologies we are studying. The term is here merely used for convenience, without any claim as to the unity or coherence of the activities covered by it.

about the Azande: "The homoeopathic element is so evident in many magical rites and in much of the *materia medica* that there is no need to give examples. It is recognized by the Azande themselves. They say, 'We use such-and-such a plant because it is like such-and-such a thing,' naming the object towards which the rite is directed." Similar objects are here brought into connection, just as similar words, or parts of words, are connected in traditional etymologies. It may be interesting to see what explanations practitioners and believers offer for the presumed efficacy of magical acts.

It appears that often the people concerned do not think much about this question. Hallpike (1972: 284; cited in Hallpike 1979: 157-58), e.g., maintains that the Konso never refer to any kind of force or supernatural power to explain their belief in the efficacy of their symbolism. Ohnuki-Tierney (1981: 44-45), similarly, observes that among the Ainu *materia medica* alone, without the involvement of a spiritual being or a ritual, is considered sufficient to effect a cure: "[T]he analogy between the physical characteristics of [the] beings used in *materia medica* and the illness. . . generates the power of what Frazer once called 'sympathetic magic'." Among the Nuer — Evans-Pritchard observes (1956: 104) — magical substances have an efficacy in themselves and do not derive their power from Spirit.

Yet there are cases documented where people do speculate about the reasons why their magic works, or should work. These reasons can be some specific power, or the involvement of spirits. The Azande, Evans-Pritchard (1976: 177) observed, "do not think very much about the matter", yet they "see that the action of medicines is unlike the action of empirical techniques and that there is something mysterious about it that has to be accounted for."<sup>43</sup> In the case of vengeance-magic, for example, they "say that the *mbisimo ngua*, 'the soul of the medicine',

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<sup>43</sup> The attitude of the Azande towards witchcraft is not dissimilar: "But even to the Azande there is something peculiar about the action of witchcraft. . . . They know that it exists and works evil, but they have to guess at the manner in which it works. . . . They only know what the others know: that the soul of witchcraft goes by night and devours the soul of its victim." (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 31).

has gone out to seek its victim.” These rationalizations themselves lead to other activities: “The virtue of a medicine is sometimes spoken of as its soul, and is believed to rise in steam and smoke when it is being cooked. Therefore people place their faces in the steam so that the magical virtue may enter into them. Likewise, Azande say that when they cook vengeance-medicines the soul of the medicine goes up in the smoke from the fire and from on high surveys the neighbourhood for the witch it goes forth to seek.” (Evans-Pritchard, 1976: 200). Malinowski (1922: 423) observed that among the Kula the spirits “are not agencies which get to work directly [in magic]. In the Trobriand demonology, the magician does not command the spirits to go and set to work. The work is done by the agency of the spell, assisted by the accompanying ritual, and performed by the proper magician. The spirits stand in the same relation, as the performer does, to the magical force, which alone is active. They can help him to wield it properly, but they can never become his instruments.” On p. 427 Malinowski states that “magic... is a specific power, ... an inherent property of certain words, uttered with the performance of certain actions... The words and acts have this power in their own right, and their action is direct and not mediated by any other agency.” Here the efficacy of magic is explained with the help of certain forces rather than spirits. “Much of the ‘sympathetic magic’ [said to underlie] the ‘Black Art’ of the Malays seems to work by control of spirits”, according to Endicott (1970: 174). This is true to the extent that the manipulation of wax figures has been said to serve the purpose of giving the spirits an example of what is expected of them (Wilkinson, 1906: 73). The ‘medicines’ of the Zulu — the sympathetic associations of which with the desired effects is often plain (Berglund, 1976: 352 f.) — “are believed to contain *amandla*, power” (id., p. 256), which is, however, not traced to any particular source (p. 257).

These examples show that the effectiveness of magical acts is not always taken for granted, and not therefore in all cases beyond the need of some form of explanation in the eyes of those who carry them out. Yet the explanations offered by the performers in these cases seem completely inapplicable to etymologies. This does not

mean that there are no similarities. We have seen that the Vedic etymologies refer virtually without exception to a mythical reality, and that sometimes a myth appears to have been created under the influence of the etymology concerned. In both cases a hidden reality is postulated in order to explain the effectiveness of magical acts and of the validity of etymologies respectively.

At this point it will be interesting to consider the theories of Neoplatonism. This is what, in the words of R.T. Wallis (1972: 70), Plotinus (204-270 C.E.) thought about paranormal phenomena: "In these (i.e., paranormal phenomena) Plotinus, like virtually all his contemporaries, except the most determined atheists and materialists — by the third century A.D. a very rare species — firmly believed. Where he differed from many of them was in attempting to accommodate such phenomena to a rational, orderly view of the world. The basis of his explanation is the Stoic doctrine of 'cosmic sympathy', the view that, since the world is a living organism, whatever happens in one part of it must produce a sympathetic reaction in every other part. It is by studying and applying the relevant forces that magicians produce their effects." One might cite here Plotinus' *Enneads* IV.4.40: "But how do magic spells work? By sympathy and by the fact that there is a natural concord of things that are alike and opposition of things that are different, . . ." (tr. Armstrong, 1984: 261).

Neoplatonists after Plotinus frequently use the term 'theurgy'.<sup>44</sup> Wallis (1972: 107) observes: "The methods of theurgy were essentially those of ritual magic, its aim the incarnation of a divine force either in a material object, such as a statue, or in a human being, the result being a state of prophetic trance. Its justification, most clearly expounded in Proclus' little essay *On the Hieratic Art*, is the magical 'Principle of Correspondence', the idea, first that each part of the universe mirrors every other part, and secondly, and more important, that the whole material world is the mirror of invisible divine powers; hence, in virtue of the network of forces linking image to archetype, manipulation of

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<sup>44</sup> Theurgy took as its authoritative basis the Chaldean Oracles which date from the mid-second century C.E.; see Johnston, 1997.

the appropriate material objects brings the theurgists into contact with the deities they represent.”<sup>45</sup>

For our present purposes it is interesting to note that some Neoplatonists, among them Proclus and others, extended these ideas beyond magic to the field of language. There is a similarity between words and objects which is of the same type as the similarity which exists between a god and his statue: “Wie die Konsekrationskunst durch gewisse Symbole und geheime Zeichen die Standbilder den Göttern ähnlich macht . . . , so bildet auch die Gesetzgebungskunst . . . die Wörter als Standbilder der Dinge, indem sie bald durch solche bald durch andere Laute die Natur der Dinge abbildet.”<sup>46</sup> And again: “Just as the demiurgic intellect brings into existence in matter the appearances of the very first Forms it contains in itself, produces temporal images of eternal beings, divisible images of indivisible beings, and from beings which are really beings produces images which have the consistency of shadow, in the same way, I think, our scientific knowledge also, which takes as its model the productive activity of the Intellect, makes by means of discourse similitudes of all the other realities and particularly of the gods themselves: . . . Since then it produces the names in that way, our scientific knowledge presents them in this ultimate degree as images of divine beings; in fact it produces each name as a statue of the gods, and just as theurgy invoked the generous goodness of the gods with a view to the illumination of statues artificially constructed, so also intellectual knowledge related to divine beings, by composition and divisions of articulated sounds, reveals the hidden being of the gods.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Note that a Christian author like Pseudo-Dionysius does not hesitate to describe the eucharist as theurgy. Here “[t]he bread and wine are representations of divine power in the same way that divine names are ‘statues’” (Janowitz, 1991: 370). For divine names as ‘statues’, see below.

<sup>46</sup> *Procli diadochi in Platonis Cratylum commentaria*, ed. G. Pasquali, Leipzig 1908, p. 19 l. 12 ff. Tr. Hirschle, 1979: 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Platonic Theology* (ed. H.D. Saffrey and L.G. Westerink, Paris 1968 f.) bk. 1, chap. 29, pp. 123-124. Tr. Janowitz, 1991: 368-369. See also Shaw, 1995: 179 ff. (“Naming the Gods”).

Since, then, words imitate their objects, one can arrive at a knowledge of objects through words, especially through etymologizing, i.e., through the constituent syllables of the words (Hirschle, 1979: 20).<sup>48</sup> Be it noted that Proclus distinguishes three kinds of words: divine, daemonic, and human. Divine words are closest to their objects, they are 'coexistent' with them, daemonic words less so, and human words have only limited similarity with their objects. Obviously human words are least capable of consequent etymological analysis. The situation is quite different with the secret names of gods, whose efficacy is the result of specially efficacious combinations of sounds.<sup>49</sup> Hirschle (1979: 27-28) draws in this connection attention to certain secret names of gods found in Greek magical papyri from Egypt, which belong to no known language: "Es sind scheinbar bedeutungslose Namen, nichts anderes als bizarre Lautkombinationen, die bis zu 100 und mehr Buchstaben umfassen können". The parallelism with the meaningless *bījamantras* of Tantrism is striking. Both in India and in the Hellenistic world, it appears, the search for the elementary constituents of language went hand in hand with the postulation of higher levels of language, in which ordinary meanings are no longer present.

This is of course not the place for a general exposition of Neoplatonic philosophy as a whole, of which the above ideas about magic and etymologizing are part. For our present purposes it suffices to retain the following observation: Neoplatonism explained both the effectiveness of magical rites and the revealing potential of etymologies with the help of one mechanism, that of cosmic sympathy. Cosmic sympathy creates a network that links similar objects, and similar words, to

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<sup>48</sup> This interest in non-historical etymologies is all the more striking in view of the fact that someone like Varro, many centuries before Proclus, seems to have made what he considered were historical etymologies (Pfaffel, 1980; cf. Barwick, 1957: 66 f.; Desbordes, 1991: 150). Regarding Plotinus' views on etymologizing, see Heiser, 1991: 20: "Plotinus himself has no comment to make on Plato's project in the *Cratylus*, and his occasional use of a Platonic etymology is not enough to indicate his view of the matter."

<sup>49</sup> According to Iamblichus, the seven vowels were connatural with the seven planetary gods; Shaw, 1995: 185 f.

each other, and to higher forces with which they share features. Cosmic sympathy is possible because the world is a living organism.

Neoplatonic ideas played a major role in the 'natural magic' that exerted much influence in Renaissance Europe (Walker, 1958; Yates, 1964; cf. Hadot, 1982). This magic — as Thomas M. Greene points out (1997: 262) — requires the assumption that there is an inherent correspondence if not an identity between sign and its object, that there is a natural language and a natural semiotics.<sup>50</sup> It comes as no surprise that sixteenth century critics of magic emphasize the conventional nature of language, which is the exact opposite of the position maintained by the upholders of magic (*ibid.* p. 255 f.). The same period has an interest in etymology.<sup>51</sup> For Petrus Ramus etymology "means that one looked in it to discover, not the original meanings of words, but the intrinsic properties of letters, syllables, and, finally, whole words" (Foucault, 1966: 35). The situation is similar "in the Neoplatonic and cabalistic exegesis of texts and analyses of language, such as one finds in Pico or Fabio Paolini. You have a significant whole, a text. . . which can be analysed into still significant parts, words (or propositions); then you go a stage further and try to find elements of the significance of the whole in single letters. . . , where in fact they do not exist." (Walker, 1958: 118). The interest in etymologies initially centered on Hebrew, the first language, but then extended to other languages as well (Maillard, 1991; Dubois, 1970: 80 f.). Even Leibniz, though critical of the idea of an original 'Ursprache', as the mystic Böhme called it, came to accept "a modified form of the Platonic doctrine of the nature of language: 'For languages have a certain natural origin, from the agreement of sounds with the dispositions of the mind [or 'affects'], which the appearances of things

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<sup>50</sup> Cp. Vickers, 1984: 95: "The occult tradition does not recognize [the] distinction [between words and things and between literal and metaphorical language]: Words are treated as if they are equivalent to things and can be substituted for them."

<sup>51</sup> The term 'paradigm-change' has been used (Gerl, 1982) to describe the changed views on language between Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) and Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597).

excite in the mind. And this origin I believe occurs not merely in the primal language, but also in languages that have grown up later in part from the primal language and in part from the new usage of men dispersed over the globe.” (Aarsleff, 1969: 88).<sup>52</sup>

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The importance of similarities in “magical” acts was already noted by anthropologists in the last century.<sup>53</sup> We shall here consider some of the ways in which these anthropologists and their successors have tried to make sense of this observation, with the ultimate aim of discovering to what extent their theories can help us to explain etymologies.

Sir Edward Tylor (1865: 124; 1891: 115 f.), followed by Sir James Frazer, ascribed the frequent presence of similarities in acts of magic to a confusion between thought associations and objective connections, to the mistake of taking “ideal connections for real connections”. Frazer (1922: 14), in particular, distinguished two principles of thought on which magic is based; he called them the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contact or Contagion. These two give rise to Homoeopathic or Imitative Magic and Contagious Magic respectively.<sup>54</sup> Frazer explained these principles as “misapplications of the association of ideas” (p. 15). In spite of this, these two principles constituted, for Frazer, a faith, as is clear from the following citation (p. 63-64): “Wherever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form,

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<sup>52</sup> Closely similar ideas are found in ancient China (Needham, 1956: 253 f.). Needham points at the connection with Frazer’s ‘law of similarity’ (p. 280) and with the correlations accepted in Renaissance Europe (p. 296 f.). It is not necessary to believe that these ideas in different parts of the world must be explained by mutual influence, as Needham (p. 297 f.) tends to think. Rather, it appears that the idea that similar things act on similar things is a rather obvious rationalization of the presumed effectiveness of certain magical and related ‘facts’.

<sup>53</sup> For a recent survey, see Cunningham, 1999.

<sup>54</sup> The discussion of magic was introduced in the second edition of *The Golden Bough*, which came out in 1900; see Ackerman, 1987: 166 f. Ackerman, referring to E.E. Evans-Pritchard, calls this analysis of magic “Frazer’s single most important contribution to the anthropology of religion”.

it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature." The Law of Similarity he described as the principle "that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause", the Law of Contact or Contagion as the principle "that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed" (p. 14). However, "the primitive magician. . . never reflects on the abstract principles involved in his actions. With him. . . logic is implicit, not explicit"; "he tacitly assumes that the Laws of Similarity and Contact are of universal application and are not limited to human actions" (p. 15).

Tylor and Frazer have frequently been criticized by more recent anthropologists.<sup>55</sup> "Perhaps one of the most devastating criticisms levelled against Tylor (that is equally appropriate to Frazer) is his never posing the question why primitives would mistake ideal connections for real ones in one domain when they do not do so in their other activities. As Evans-Pritchard puts it — and in this he and Malinowski stand together —: 'The error here was in not recognizing that the associations are social and not psychological stereotypes, and that they occur therefore only when evoked in specific ritual situations, which are also of limited duration. . .'"<sup>56</sup>

Frazer's 'laws', too, have been severely criticized. Beattie, for example, observed (1964: 206): "Nobody in their senses could possibly believe that all things that share some common quality, and all things that have once been in contact, are continually affecting one another;

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<sup>55</sup> Cp. Douglas, 1978. Ackerman (1998: 129) observes: "By the late 1960s the reputation[. . .] of Frazer [was] about as low as [it] could be. Whenever an anthropologist interested in the history of the idea of 'primitive' religion bothered to consider Frazer, he was regarded as wholly lacking in redeeming intellectual value, the very model of how *not* to do anthropology or think about religion".

<sup>56</sup> Tambiah, 1990: 51, with a quotation from Evans-Pritchard, 1933: 29.

in a world so conceived almost everything would all the time be affecting almost everything else, and all would be chaos.”<sup>57</sup> Tambiah (1968: 37) remarked, similarly: “. . . Frazer’s principles. . . lead to absurd inferences about the logic of magic.”

Here it is to be recalled that Frazer did not himself subscribe to this conception of the world. Quite on the contrary, he attributed it to those who practise and believe in magic. Frazer’s critics are no doubt right in thinking that most magicians and their followers do not entertain such a conception, but saying that “nobody in their senses could possibly believe” in it certainly goes too far. We have seen that a respectable school of philosophy, Neoplatonism, adhered to ideas very similar to those formulated by Frazer, and was capable of inspiring thinkers many centuries later.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, recent research suggests that Frazer may have formulated his theories under the direct or indirect influence of Renaissance thought.<sup>59</sup> In fact, our preceding exposition has shown that also those who tried to give a rational explanation, and justification, of the use of etymologies arrived at views not dissimilar to the ones which Frazer ascribed to his “primitives”. While many anthropologists have, no doubt rightly, criticized Frazer for underestimating the amount of common sense in the people he describes, no one seems to have raised the equally valid criticism that he overestimated their desire, or tendency, to create rational systems of thought.

It is of course possible to maintain that Frazer’s classification, as classification, leaves to be desired. This is John Skorupski’s position, who in his *Symbol and Theory* (1976) proposes instead the following modified classification: symbolic identification and contagious trans-

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<sup>57</sup> See further Skorupski, 1976: 138 f.

<sup>58</sup> Similar ideas existed in China, too; see Henderson, 1984: ch. 1 (“Correlative thought in early China”).

<sup>59</sup> Cp. Hanegraaff, 1998: 266: “[Frazer’s] sympathetic magic can be divided into homeopathic (imitative, mimetic) and contagious magic; a distinction which may well have been taken straight from Tylor’s *Researches* who, in turn, could have found it in the great compendium of Renaissance magic: Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*” and *ibid.* n. 47: “Tylor repeatedly quotes Agrippa in *Primitive Culture*”.

fer. The importance of identification in the first of these two is emphasized: “The symbol in some sense *is*, or participates in, the reality it represents.” (Skorupski, 1976: 144). It is not difficult to see that this modified classification, and in particular the symbolic identification which Skorupski recognizes in a part of so-called magical acts, are as useful as Frazer’s Law of Similarity, if not more so, to make sense of etymologies. David Freedberg, speaking about images in particular, maintains<sup>60</sup> that many theories, from Frazer’s laws of similarity and contagion to more contemporary notions of sympathy, identification, symbolic linkage, association of ideas, evocative resonance of symbols, or what have you, assume the disjunction between the symbol and the symbolized — between representation and reality. But this is precisely what is *not* given at the level of our emotional and cognitive response to images. Hence he says (Freedberg, 1989: 436): “we will only come to understand response if we acknowledge more fully the ways in which the disjunction . . . lapses when we stand in the presence of images.” Once again it is possible without difficulty to transfer this to the understanding of semantic etymologies.

A more serious criticism would be to doubt the belief of the actors in the efficacy of magical acts. Gilbert Lewis puts it as follows (1994: 568): “Take, for example, sorcery as an example of magical belief. If we assume a man’s true and literal belief in his sorcery, then either violence or the sorcery will seem to be ways to harm his enemy. The sorcery might substitute for the violence. But if we slacken the certainty of his belief, impute less of the literal to his statement, then his sorcery action may become that much more of an act which stands for something violent he would like to do but which he does not wholly dare, and perhaps not really desire, to carry out. It is a substitute, but a partial one. And it becomes in part symbolic to the man himself.” This position, which seems to be representative of the majority of present-

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<sup>60</sup> As presented in Sharf, 1999: 85. Sharf’s own concern is primarily with Buddhist relics, which are “for all intents and purposes, formless” and do not represent or signify anything. For a presentation of the differences between Freedberg’s and Skorupski’s positions, see Freedberg, 1989: 274 ff.

day thinkers in this domain, implies for homeopathic magic that its actors do not really think that similar things are related to each other. A parallelism with semantic etymologies is hard to maintain in this case.

Lewis expresses himself carefully in the above passage (“it becomes *in part* symbolic to the man himself”) and further softens down his position in the next paragraph.<sup>61</sup> He does not totally reject the idea that perhaps some practitioners of magic sometimes believe that there is after all some kind of connection between the substitute and the object it represents. For an analysis of the situation, we must consider S.J. Tambiah’s *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality* (1990). After discussing Tylor and Frazer, Tambiah turns to Malinowski’s views on magic, and observes (p. 73):

Malinowski had two specific insights into the internal structure and constitution of Trobriand rites. The first was that they exploited simultaneously both words and acts, both speech and the manipulation of objects and substances, thereby posing the problem of the logic of use of multiple media in ritual for his successors to ponder over. Secondly his so-called ‘ethnographic theory of the magical word’ proposed some illuminating insights which foreshadowed and anticipated in England Austin’s ‘linguistic philosophical’ notions of performative force carried by speech acts, that is, how speech acts created both illocutionary and perlocutionary effects by virtue of being conventional acts; and in this country [= U.S.A., JB], Kenneth Burke’s discussion of the ‘rhetoric of motives’.

Yet Tambiah is not completely happy with Malinowski’s position. Observing that “it would seem that we cannot yet completely exorcize the ghosts of Tylor and Frazer”, he concedes that magic has a dual structure (p. 82-83):

On the one hand, it seems to imitate the logic of technical/technological action that seeks to transform nature or the world of natural things and manifestations. On the other hand, its structure is also transparently rhetorical and performative (in that it consists of acts to create effects on human actors according to accepted social conventions). Tylor and Frazer fastened exclusively on the first equation

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<sup>61</sup> Lewis, 1994: 568: “People must differ individually in how they view the truth of what they assert in common with others in their community. . . Emotion and feeling as well as reason enter into the link between assertion and conviction. . .”

and said it was bad science; Malinowski appreciated the force of the second equation and said that magic was constituted of speech acts in a performative and persuasive mode, and that therefore they were pragmatically reasonable. . . . The now puzzling duality of magic will disappear only when we succeed in embedding magic in a more ample theory of human life in which the path of ritual action is seen as an indispensable mode for man anywhere and everywhere of relating to and participating in the life of the world.

Tambiah's recognition of 'the other side' of magic would seem to be a major step forward with regard to his own earlier studies (e.g., Tambiah 1968, 1973) and those of others.<sup>62</sup> Tambiah develops this idea further by distinguishing two 'orientations to the world', which he calls *participation* and *causality*. He then explains (p. 108): "Although 'causation' and 'participation' may seem different or contrastive orientations to the world, the analyst must maintain that both are projected on the experiential and symbolizing capacities of the *same* sensory modalities of man — the modalities of touch, taste, hearing, seeing. . . . If participation emphasizes sensory and affective communication and the language of emotions, causality stresses the rationality of instrumental action and the language of cognition. But these are ideal type exag-

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<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Kilani, 1989: 126: "La magie est un langage symbolique, un mode de communication sociale, . . . L'efficacité d'un acte magique consiste dans le fait de dire des choses sur l'individu ou un groupe d'individus qui sont en train d'accomplir une action donnée. La magie a une efficacité sociale, elle peut dans certains cas se transformer en moyen de mobilisation sociale." Similarly Kilani, 1983: *passim*. Waardenburg, on the other hand, recognizes the objective connections that are supposed to underlie magical acts; see Waardenburg, 1986: 196: "Wesentlich bei diesen Völkern ist eine Grundanschauung von Zusammenhängen, die es zwischen den Dingen gibt." (The Dutch version of this book (1990: 203) speaks of "verbanden en samenhangen. . . die wij in het Westen niet kennen" ('relations and connections which we in the West do not know').) H.E. Brekle, speaking from the point of view of 'popular linguistics', observes (1990: 42): "Ce qui est essentiel pour toutes sortes d'activités magiques à l'aide de moyens langagiers, c'est la foi ou la croyance dans les effets produits par la seule énonciation de certains mots ou de certaines formules. Cela implique que ces 'croyants' (exécuteurs et 'victimes') prennent pour assuré qu'il existe des rapports nécessaires et causaux, voire des rapports d'identité, entre le nom d'une chose et la chose elle-même, ou l'énonciation d'une formule et l'état de choses évoqué par cette formule."

generations, and neither can exclude the devices of the other.” In other words, at least some of the practitioners of magic do not totally exclude the idea that magic has a causal effect on the intended person or object.

The idea of multiple orientations to the world is plausible, and Tambiah presents a number of arguments which support it. This does not change the fact that his position remains in some respects very close to the one of Tylor and Frazer. These scholars had claimed that magic made the mistake of taking ideal connections for real connections. Tambiah rather speaks of an orientation, or ordering of reality, in which people believe in the causal efficacy of communicative acts. In both cases there is a mistake regarding objective reality.<sup>63</sup> And in both cases this mistake finds its origin in the subjective realm.<sup>64</sup> It appears, then, that Tambiah’s latest attempt, in spite of its obvious

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<sup>63</sup> In spite of claims to the contrary, Freedberg would seem to admit the same in the following passage (Freedberg, 1989: 276; the use of ‘elide’ and ‘elision’ in this passage does not appear to have any of the meanings enumerated in the Webster’s and the New Shorter Oxford English dictionaries; the index states under ‘Elision of image and prototype’: “*See also* Fusion of image and prototype” (p. 524)): “When we see the resembling image, we elide it with the living prototype it represents. . . This tendency to elision does not happen by some kind of magical process. It is part of cognition and it lies at the root of the belief in the efficacy of ‘magical’ images. Aware of the supervening tendency to abstract and differentiate, makers of defamatory or magical images encourage the elision, and set out to preempt the move to differentiation.”

<sup>64</sup> This, of course, opens the way to psychological explanations, such as the one offered by C.R. Hallpike (1979: 429), which draws on the work of Piaget: “Ethnographic literature is replete with examples of the way in which primitives treat mental and bodily conditions and processes, properties and qualities of physical objects, and physical processes, as well as conditions of society such as ill luck, sin, and general ill health, as entities which can be transmitted from man to nature, from one natural object to another, and from natural objects to man, in an enormous variety of ways. The true significance of this cognitive phenomenon is not so much that it is a case of Frazer’s homeopathic magic, of ‘like producing like’, as of the pre-operative propensity to isolate particular phenomena and treat them as bounded entities which can be detached from their physical context with absolute properties and an inner dynamism of their own. The reification of process in particular is a notable example of this proclivity of mind. . .” For an attempt to provide an evolutionary explanation

strong sides, has indeed not been able to exorcise the ghosts of Tylor and Frazer.<sup>65</sup>

In a way Tambiah's latest position is not very different from the one presented by Skorupski already in 1976, in a work mentioned earlier. Skorupski, too, discusses the relationship between magic and performative acts; he speaks in this connection of operative actions. While emphasizing the identificationist view of symbolic magic, he concedes that magic can be incorporated within operative theory if it is interpreted as a way of triggering a consequential action, that is as "a way of signalling what is being done and thereby doing it" (Skorupski, 1976: 153; cp. Cunningham, 1999: 84). It is further interesting to note that L. Wittgenstein, who often appears to hold an expressive, anti-instrumental view of magic, elsewhere provides "the most persuasive arguments against his own anti-instrumental objections, so that what we have is more a matter of genuine ambivalence than simple inconsistency."<sup>66</sup>

## 7.

Let us now return to our main subject matter, semantic etymologies. Does the above discussion about magical acts help us to understand these etymologies better? It does if we assume — with Tambiah, with Skorupski and, yes, with Frazer — that at least in certain cases magical acts are believed "to transform nature or the world of natural things and manifestations" (Tambiah). In other words, things are accepted — in specific circumstances perhaps — to be related to or identical with certain other things which they resemble. This does not have to

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of the two laws of sympathetic magic as observed in the psychology of disgust, see Pinker, 1997: 378 ff.

<sup>65</sup> One may also wonder — as did Sharpe a quarter century ago (1975: 94) — whether "[p]erhaps the time is now approaching when fashionable impatience with Frazer will give place to a sober estimate of his contribution to comparative religion in its anthropological aspect. He may then prove to have been greater, rather than smaller, than we thought."

<sup>66</sup> Cioffi, 1998: 155-182 ("Wittgenstein on making homeopathic magic clear"); quoted sentence on p. 156.

mean that all things are related to or identical with everything that they resemble, even though this belief has occasionally been maintained (e.g. in Renaissance magic), as we have seen. The apparently widespread conviction that similarity can indicate relatedness or identity between things allows us to make sense of semantic etymologies. These etymologies are meant to reveal the connections that exist between the words concerned, and consequently between the things denoted by them.

We must be careful not to attribute explicit convictions of this kind to all those who use semantic etymologies. This would be as mistaken as attributing similar ideas to those who practice homeopathic (or imitative) magic; this was Frazer's mistake, for which he has repeatedly been chided, as we have seen. Most users of semantic etymologies will not have any systematic world view that explains their assumed validity. In this respect they contrast with those users of magic who often "explain" the presumed efficacy of magical acts with the help of notions of spirits or something of the kind. An exception is constituted by certain Neoplatonic thinkers who, as we have seen, elaborated a view of the world in which similarities, also between words, played a central role.

How about the other explanation of magical acts that we have discussed? Is the notion of 'speech acts in a performative and persuasive mode' able to account for semantic etymologies? This is unlikely. Semantic etymologies are not performative acts and have no persuasive validity, as far as I can see; they certainly don't in early and classical Indian literature. Their aim appears to be to bring to light existing connections or identities (i.e., connections or identities that are presumed to exist), not to bring about new connections or to persuade others.

This leads us to the following conclusion. Semantic etymologies share with many acts of so-called sympathetic magic the underlying belief that similar things can be related to, or even identical with, each other. This belief is not normally systematized (with some rare exceptions), and indeed it is rarely formulated. It is for this reason perhaps better to speak of it as an intuition rather than as a consciously held belief. There is no claim that all similar things are related to each

other (again with some rare exceptions), and it may be difficult to discern in each particular case why certain things rather than others are assumed to be thus connected. This intuition does not only account for the almost universal occurrence of sympathetic magic, but also for the equally quasi-universal use of semantic etymologies.

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# ACADEMIC NOMADISM: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY OF RELIGION

BERIT THORBJØRNSRUD

## *Summary*

Through a narrative of the author's personal academic nomadism, the concepts of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies are explored. It is argued that while interdisciplinary studies are currently being praised, insufficient attention seems to be directed at the methodological challenges involved. Rather a line of strategic avoidance seems to be adopted. Drawing on insights from migrant studies the author compares the questionable concept of migrants as potentially "falling-between-cultures" with the fear of "falling-between-disciplines" sometimes experienced by scholars attempting to move within various disciplines.

While there are important reasons why academic boundaries are retained, their existence may also influence the way scholars approach the field in an undesirable manner. By examples from the study of Islam/Muslims, the author illustrates how the boundary between, for example, social anthropology and history of religion tends to become mixed up with boundaries in the field in such a way that our understanding of the field may become seriously distorted.

Exploring what transcending boundaries truly involves, the author discusses the meaning of concepts like strategic avoidance, tacit knowledge and triangulation in action, and reflects on their usefulness in terms of actually establishing interdisciplinary studies and/or scholarship.

In order to discuss the relationship between social anthropology and the history of religions, several different approaches are available; one can choose a historical and/or institutional approach; one can choose to focus on the differences between the two disciplines' definitions of their topic of study, i.e., religion versus social life; or, one can choose to discuss their potentially different views on textual versus observation data. While all these elements naturally belong to a discussion of the relationship between anthropology and history of religions, in this context I shall choose, however, another more personal approach, in which my own experience of moving back and forth between the two disci-

plines will constitute the starting-point. Through a reflection on what such nomadism entails, my goal is to deepen our understanding of academic boundaries and suggest new ways of transcending, in this case, the boundary between social anthropology and the history of religions.

The concepts of academic boundaries may be compared to the concept of cultural boundaries, and thus I find it useful to begin this discussion by taking a closer look on migrants who may be described as “cultural nomads.”

*In Between — Is There Such a Place?*

While children of immigrants are commonly described as caught between two cultures, the Norwegian scholar Sissel Østberg argues that they may develop what she calls *integrated plural identities* (1999). On the basis of her research on children of Pakistani descent in Oslo, she refutes the idea that their particular circumstances *inherently* cause personal conflicts of value and identity confusion. On the contrary, she claims that their familiarity with several cultural codes potentially allows them to develop a *broad cultural competence*. Far from being “caught in between,” they are exposed to a *cultural flow*, which may enable them to internalize a high degree of very useful *cultural flexibility*. Thus, according to Østberg, these children may better be understood in terms of what they positively gain than in terms of what they lose.

However, descendants of immigrants frequently complain about ethnic Norwegians’ non-acceptance of such an identity construction. While Egyptians, for example, tend to initiate conversations about one’s family status, Norwegians tend to ask about strangers’ geographical origin. Among ethnic Norwegians this question represents a neutral way of starting a conversation, but, transferred to the majority-minority context, it may easily be transformed to a question about national belonging, i.e., *the right to belong*. Accordingly, many perceive such questions as representing an exclusion technique. Additionally they may resent the implicit pressure to identify themselves in clear-cut categories, for example, Norwegian or Pakistani, which of course violates their own complex identity construction (see, for example, Mah

Ruk Ali 1997). In Østberg's terms, they may be understood as being denied the right to an integrated plural identity.

Having myself adapted to the university in a way which may best be described in terms of academic nomadism, I can easily identify with minority members' unease about being questioned about their true belonging. When asked about my disciplinary identity, I, too, may experience this as pressure to diminish the diversity of my academic background in order to fit into established categories, and it always leaves me with a feeling of lacking any true belonging. In a sense I feel forced to make a choice of identity which automatically excludes a complexity which I personally have come to cherish. To illustrate the point, I shall give a short account of my professional background.

After working and being heavily engaged in politics for many years, I started my academic career at the Faculty of Arts, first doing Egyptology and then the history of religions. Then I switched to the Faculty of Social Science to do anthropology, and later my graduate work was accomplished within this discipline. I received my doctoral fellowship, however, from the Faculty of Arts, and my subsequent thesis was to be within the discipline of history of religion. Accordingly, my supervisor was selected from this discipline. But due to administrative reasons I was transferred to the Department of East European and Oriental Studies, where I was to fulfil my teaching duties at the interdisciplinary Middle Eastern Area Studies. While my closest colleague was an historian, all the other members of the department were philologists. I attended the doctoral programme at the Department of Cultural Studies in which history of religion constitutes one section. While the head of this programme was a social geographer, the participants represented various disciplines such as history, history of ideas, history of religion, ethnology and folklore. Additionally, during the last ten years, I have been very much engaged in lecturing at various colleges, such as the College of Economics and the College of Nursing. Last but not least, I have also been involved in cross-cultural training of groups of professionals as diverse as midwives and immigration officials.

In other words, responding to a question about academic identity is no simple matter. Am I an anthropologist, a historian of religion, a

scholar of the Middle East, a teacher of cross-cultural studies, or am I something quite different? Østberg explains that her informants tend to identify themselves differently according to context; I admit to doing the same. I tend to choose according to which identity I consider will be most easily understood, and, not least, most appreciated. When I choose to reveal the full complexity, however, the ensuing response is generally bewilderment; or else it is formulated in terms of another question about what I *truly* am. It seems that the idea of identity as hierarchically organized tends to imply that one identity by definition must overrule every other, and when none fits the known categories, it becomes a problem. While at present I myself may find comfort in Østberg's term of integrated plural identity, the immediate question, however, is what does that mean in terms of academic research? Plural identity may perhaps be understood, but integrated? How does an academic with an integrated plural identity approach a topic of research, and how does she communicate her findings to an audience? This question may be related to the much cherished concept of *interdisciplinary* studies. Although in many contexts this represents an honourable concept, few seem to have any idea what it really involves, and in which way it may be distinguished from a concept like *multi-disciplinary*.

### *Falling off the Edge?*

When as a child I learnt of a place in Norway actually called Verdens Ende — the End of the World, I imagined this literally as the end of the world, and I wondered a great deal about what it would be like looking over the edge, and whether I could fall off, and where I would then end up? Much later, when I switched from anthropology and back to the history of religions, I worried a lot about becoming caught “between disciplines,” i.e., ending up like the descendants of immigrants caught “between cultures.” My fear was that I would end up as neither anthropologist nor historian of religion, and then it seemed again as if I was back in my childhood fantasy wondering about falling off the edge of the known and into nothingness. But through my reflections on the impossibility of existing “between cultures” I have also realized that there is no actual place *between* disciplines; there is no

academic nothingness to fall into. Such fears are based on a faulty way of categorizing and a way of thinking which confuses the question of disciplinary boundaries with the entirely different question of good or bad scholarship.

The various academic disciplines have developed historically as separate disciplines, both due to topical and methodological issues, but also due to more mundane administrative, economic and/or person-related contingencies (see, for example, Ruud 1998 for an interesting account of the origin of the history of religions as a separate field of study at the University of Oslo). Today, however, it may be questioned to what extent it is beneficial to design academic research in terms of the same bounded disciplines. First of all, experience demonstrates that the existence of such boundaries has in many cases had unfortunate consequences for how the objects of research have been represented. In the case of the Middle East, for example, the way much research has been organized has resulted in a problematic differentiation between so-called "true Islam" and "not-so-true-Muslims."

Secondly, the present enormous accumulation of available material inherently makes specialization a necessity. While this specialization on one level may be understood to support the need for disciplinary boundaries, on another it may be understood as demanding new kinds of relationships between scholars which undermine the very same boundaries.

Thirdly, one must also take into account the present proliferation of new disciplines, and the reasons why these are becoming popular. The complexity of contemporary society and its high pace of change force professionals repeatedly to return to "school." For example, a consequence of the increasing globalization is an increasing demand for cross-cultural training. The traditional channels for such training have been provided either by disciplines such as anthropology or history of religions, or rather limited seminars organized outside the formal educational institutions. While such seminars may be experienced as too limiting, traditional university disciplines may be considered unsatisfactory. Professionals such as nurses, teachers, social workers or members of the police force, may very well experience a need for better

theoretical training but confronted with the curriculums of anthropology or the history of religions, they may understandably hesitate. Their needs are defined in terms of a desire to extend their existing training, in order to increase their competence within their chosen profession. Some may also want to establish research projects based on their place of work, and this will influence their choice of data collection, tools and methods. Very likely these will be of a more journalistic or small scale character, and involve qualitative interviewing and small-scale surveys. Their methods are likely to be those that can be handled without a long training in foreign languages or social analysis. Such applied scholarship may indeed produce very interesting studies, but it is highly questionable whether four or five years of studying, for example, general anthropology before being able to delve into what initially caught one's interest would be a satisfying experience. The fact is that every academic discipline has become so overloaded with historical traditions, concepts, theoretical and methodological debates that not only novices but also those with more experience may lose courage. From the point of view of a practising teacher or midwife, it may be very difficult to understand why they should have to study tribal organization in New Guinea or ancient Buddhist texts in order to improve their work performance, or do a small case study in relation to this. Thus, they choose new kinds of study programmes more directly related to their needs. As such programmes' "year zero" was only yesterday, there is less sense of being overwhelmed, and more opportunities for experiencing personal and professional continuity. Such feelings are apparently also shared by some students with a traditional B.A. background; it is not that they want an easy way out, but rather that they may have very specific plans for their future professional lives.

Among university people such new study programmes are frequently spoken of as *hybrids*, a term which seems to imply that they are of lesser value than the traditional disciplines. In order to transcend boundaries such programmes inherently involve cutting off historical roots and establishing a "new year zero," and, by doing so, the value of the traditional disciplines' inheritance is implicitly questioned. The anthropologist Hylland Eriksen calls his introductory book to anthropol-

ogy “Small Places — Large Questions” (*Små steder, store spørsmål*, 1993). Perhaps the new hybrid disciplines indicate that the anthropological questions have become too large (or too overloaded) to fit many of the new concerns?

However, the results contributed by such programmes remain to be seen, but in my view they represent interesting experiments, and I look forward to seeing what kind of knowledge such students and scholars produce.

### *Looking through the Kaleidoscope*

As it is no longer *comme il faut* to speak of “cultures which meet,” I will also question to what extent it makes sense to speak of “disciplines which meet” or of any clearcut relationships between disciplines. It is obviously *people* who meet, not cultures or academic disciplines, and it seems to me that cooperation between variously trained academics may bring about interesting synergetic effects when they all choose to focus on related research issues. This does not mean that I want to eliminate the concept of a discipline or dissolve their very useful organizational framework, but it means that I would prefer academic boundaries to be considered in less essentializing terms, and rather in terms of shifting pragmatic needs.

The kaleidoscope may serve as an inspiring metaphor for future scholarship. When turning a kaleidoscope around, the various images glide into each other; there are no fixed boundaries and no open spaces in between; but simultaneously there is transformation and continuity. Glancing, for example, at the Muslim world through a kaleidoscope constructed by variously trained scholars, one may learn to acknowledge both the shifting aspects of Muslims’ lives, and the infinite combinations of life strategies which exist. While the kaleidoscope as a metaphor naturally also contains its own limitations, it may still serve as an inspiration to transcend existing boundaries.

### *Strategic Avoidance*

For my doctoral defense I was asked to lecture on the relationship between social anthropology and the history of religions. As may be

obvious from what has already been said, receiving such a topic could easily appear to me as another question in disguise about my academic identity, and once more trigger off my previous fears of falling off the edge.<sup>1</sup> And it did, though under the circumstances I was once again forced to consider the content of this reaction. This process of introspection proved to be valuable, as it also forced me to struggle to make explicit certain assumptions so far submerged in my tacit knowledge.

According to the Swedish scholar Billy Ehn (1991), multi-ethnic groups of youths tend to develop what I will term *strategic avoidance* in order to enable their interaction to run smoothly. This involves avoiding raising certain topics or avoiding raising them in ways which may be sensitive to members of certain cultural/religious/ethnic groups when they are present. Consequently they develop a highly flexible competence as to what to talk about and how, according to context.

In my doctoral thesis on the Coptic Orthodox concept of the body, there is no explicit statement about disciplinary belonging.<sup>2</sup> In order to explain why, I find the concept of strategic avoidance useful. Firstly, I will claim that I wanted to avoid, however implicitly, identifying any possible boundary between anthropology and the history of religions as *either problematic or challenging*; I wanted to avoid any either/or, and just simply present my thesis as a study to be evaluated on its own terms. This means that I allowed my experience of academic nomadism to remain muted. This must also be understood as resulting from a lack of terminology which could adequately express the process of moving within various disciplines, without being imprisoned in dichotomies and oppositions. The concept of interdisciplinary studies is frequently celebrated, but few, if any, seem really able to verbalize

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Norwegian doctoral defense, the candidate has to give two public lectures; one on a topic chosen by the candidate, and one on a topic chosen by the committee. This paper is based on the topic I was given by my committee.

<sup>2</sup> The full name of the thesis is "Controlling the body to liberate the soul. Towards an analysis of the Coptic Orthodox concept of the body." This study is mainly based on field data (1986-1997), but Coptic theological publications also constitute an important part.

what it involves, and/or describe the process of transformation from a multi-disciplinary to an interdisciplinary approach.

A multi-disciplinary approach can be compared to producing separate images of, for example, Copts in Cairo, and hanging them fully framed next to each other on the wall, as an illustration of how anthropologists, historians, Arabists, etc. would “do it.” While this may very well be interesting, an interdisciplinary approach is supposed to involve what may be described as *triangulation in action*, i.e., while working in the field or while constructing the ensuing text, one combines various sources of data and various disciplinary approaches in a way which establishes a new and different view of reality (see, for example, Miles & Huberman 1984: 234 ff). To move from one discipline or one perspective to another is often considered to be based on a rational change of focus — a volitional act that may correct and improve what is observed within one’s original framework. The methodological purpose is to take another look or use a different set of data in order to check one’s first observations (ibid). However, such a movement between different perspectives involves more than a rational change of positions. In fact, it involves a literal transition into another community of research, in which perspectives and methodological tools are interwoven with the “tacit knowledge” of the discipline, i.e., the interpretations that are taken for granted; the definition of data; the implicit ranking of techniques and data. (Lahn 1998). Is textual evidence, for example, considered of a higher value than “thick descriptions” from the field?

In this sense triangulation involves a transition or a resocialization into another research community with a different body of “tacit knowledge.” Thus, such a move represents a personal commitment and is a risky affair because it inherently involves changing oneself and, in a sense, allowing oneself to fall off the edge. Likewise, if a change of perspective is primarily an initiation into the “tacit” assumptions of an academic discipline, it is difficult to understand which language to use when describing the transition. How should I describe my wandering between anthropology and the history of religions?

For my doctoral defense I also gave a lecture on the Norwegian public discourse on Muslim women.<sup>3</sup> Taking this lecture as an illustration, one may ask whether this was an anthropological lecture, a lecture in the history of religions, a combination of the two, or an example of something else. Attempting to categorize it of course involves making the reasons for the choice explicit. Then we are back to the same challenge — how to retrace and categorize the various disciplinary perspectives I have been exposed to, and how to retrace and verbalize their various bodies of “tacit knowledge.” Again, this challenge must not be confused with the question of whether the lecture was interesting or not.

To sum up, my strategic avoidance of a clearcut identification of my thesis is clearly related to the complexity both of interdisciplinary approaches in general, and of my own personal experience in particular. Strategic avoidance is, however, more widespread.

In my experience many academics apply strategic avoidance in relation to disciplinary boundaries when in contact with colleagues from other disciplines. People seem both to have realized that passing across boundaries may be useful and to have simply given up on old and sometimes bitter debates. However, this does not mean that the disciplinary boundaries have in fact disappeared, nor that they are not reactualized amongst colleagues from one’s own group. While the honourable academic rhetoric seems to spin around the need for interdisciplinary studies and research, it is still interesting to see how academic boundaries occasionally are re-established. While the Faculty of Arts at the University of Oslo has on several occasions accepted doctoral candidates from the Faculty of Social Science, to my knowledge the opposite has never occurred so far. On the other hand, when one of my colleagues wanted to attend parts of the doctoral programme at anthropology, this was refused by those in charge of the parallel programme at the Department of Cultural Studies because she “belonged to the Faculty of Arts.” Anyone who has

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<sup>3</sup> The full title of this lecture was: Weeping for the Muslim Cinderellas. A lament of tears shed though not shared.

participated in interdisciplinary or perhaps rather multi-disciplinary examinations committees can testify to the way academic boundaries resurface at such occasions. This may have both positive and negative consequences, but, importantly, such occasions seem to make us acutely aware of how our various disciplines influence our readings. On another level, traditional stereotypes of “the others” are frequently reproduced and evidently perceived as good to think with.

#### *Academic Disciplines and Boundaries*

Academic disciplines have been compared to tribes and/or ethnic groups, and like ethnic groups they seem to perceive their differences in normative terms. While ethnic groups may speak of the others — those on the other side of the hill — in terms of a lack of morals and manners, academics tend to express the difference in terms of the others’ lack of methodologies, understanding of history, linguistic skills, sound reflections on the status of knowledge, etc. Perhaps as a defence mechanism against the eternal criticism of academics in ivory towers, far removed from real life, another dichotomy seems to be perceived as useful: while people from the humanities speak of social scientists as lost within their impossible terminologies and alienating theories, social scientists may describe people in the humanities as lost among all their dusty old manuscripts and grammatical subtleties. Accordingly, social scientists seem to speak a language nobody can understand, while those in the humanities seem not to have discovered yet the world of the living, and both groups may then accuse the other of being the true inhabitants of the infamous ivory tower.

Like all stereotypes, these too have some relationship to reality, however shaky. The interesting point, however, is that while the differences between, for example, anthropology and the history of religions were much greater previously, the perception of differences may on one level have become stronger. As Fredrik Barth (1969) argues about ethnic boundaries, although actual differences between two groups may decrease due to inter-ethnic interaction, the *perception* of or perhaps the need for differences may increase. Thus the sense of a boundary may become stronger through increasing contact. In my

view something similar has happened to anthropologists and historians of religions. Forty, thirty or perhaps even twenty five years ago, the topic of this paper would hardly have been considered interesting. At that time most anthropologists were still searching for those very far away, and the historians of religions in, for example, Oslo were mainly studying very dead Copts and Gnostics. In other words, while one group was listening to those who could not write, the other was reading the testaments of those who could no longer speak. The categories were clearcut; anthropologists did participatory observation abroad, and historians of religions did historical and literary analysis of dead peoples' manuscripts.

By the end of the seventies this uncomplicated pattern started changing very rapidly; both anthropologists and historians of religion discovered their own front porch and suddenly found themselves in a position of competition. To whom, for example, did the immigrants "belong"? Ever since there has been an increasing overlap in what anthropologists and historians of religions have studied, i.e., in terms of religion. However, there is of course one inherent difference between the two; while historians of religions have but one topic, i.e., religion, to anthropologists religion is but one aspect of social and cultural life which is their concern. But as the understanding of the topic "religion" has been extended to embrace not only living members of religious groups, whether believers or not, but also people who actively oppose religion and, not least, how beliefs and practices are being transformed through time, history of religion has vastly extended its field of interest.

In 1984, Einar Thomassen emphasized texts as the main source of data for history of religion (1984: 23). In his introductory article on the discipline, only half a page was applied to a discussion of fieldwork as a method, while a considerable number of pages were applied to what he considered the main methods, namely critical historical and literary analyses of texts (1984). According to Thomassen, it is through texts that "religions speak with their own voices" (ibid: 24).<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork,

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<sup>4</sup> In this context texts means both sacred texts and other kinds of religious texts, such as, for example, prayers, psalms, theological and spiritual texts.

however, was an important method for studies of illiterate peoples and studies of “*more folkreligious elements* in modern societies” (ibid: 25, my emphasis).

While texts still remain important to historians of religions, there are few among the rising number of students who actually achieve the philological competence to really study, for example, Islamic, Hindu, or Buddhist texts in the original. On the other hand, the redefinition of “religion” has encouraged historians of religions to embrace other research methods, particularly various kinds of fieldwork and other kinds of data sources, for example, the media. Thus, Thomassen’s description of the field no longer covers the complexity of the discipline.

On the other side of the hill, anthropologists have to a greater extent acknowledged the need for historical and/or text studies in order to situate better the groups they study. Fredrik Barth once described anthropologists as people who “wade out into the river and study it as it flows past, while historians content themselves with investigating the dried out river-bank” (Hylland Eriksen 1993: 35). Today, however, this seems more like a joke. But to my knowledge, at least in Norway, little if any time is spent on actually teaching students of anthropology historical and/or literary methods. Likewise, while students in the history of religions are encouraged to do fieldwork, they do not receive much instruction on what this really involves. On the other hand, the discipline’s basic methods — historical and literary analysis of texts — are not formally taught either, but are largely left to the kind of osmosis which may occur when teachers and students work together on actual texts.

As representatives of both disciplines demonstrate a greater openness, simultaneously they confront new challenges, and sometimes of a kind they are not even trained to recognize. The question is to what extent anthropologists, with their particular training, are able to grasp and incorporate the complexities of, for example, Islamic traditions.

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At a much later date, 1999, Thomassen has published a very interesting article, in which he offers a more in-depth analysis of the possibilities and limitations of philological methods in the study of religion.

On the other hand, to what extent are historians of religions trained to contextualize, for example, contemporary Muslims' beliefs and strategies? Introductory books on Islamic history and theology, or on social science, are hardly sufficient to grasp the subtle knowledge and techniques other disciplines have spent decades developing. This means that one may even be unable to question the conclusions of another discipline on its own terms, and thus end up being needlessly submissive. Let me use the study of Islam and/or Muslims as an illustration of how academic boundaries have been reconstructed as boundaries within the field itself.

### *Constructing Boundaries within the Field*

The result of the traditional division of work in regard to research on the Middle East may be summed up as the rather problematic distinction between "true Islam" and "the-many-not-so-true-Muslims" — a distinction which has also had important consequences for how women have been constructed as "even-more-untrue-Muslims" than men. As in other societies with equally long and important scriptural traditions, scholars of the Islamic world have differentiated between various forms of religious beliefs and practices in terms of dichotomies like the Great and the Little Tradition; High and Low Islam; Normative and popular Islam; and/or simply Islam and folk religion. While naturally there is a need for categorizations of different types of religious activities, the mentioned terminology is inherently normative and may thus implicitly establish a hierarchy of believers. Among Muslims themselves, as among any other religious group, there are naturally continuous debates and battles about the definition of true Islam, and how to embody this definition correctly. Unfortunately scholars have tended, apparently unconsciously, to take sides and thus have evaluated believers according to similar definitions of correct and incorrect "Islam."

Philologists, historians and historians of religion have traditionally approached the study of the Islamic world through texts. Firstly, because texts represent their obvious source of data, and, secondly,

because many have considered that, as Thomassen writes, it is through texts that “religions may speak in their own voice” (1984: 24).

It represents an important Islamic idea that Islam is based on god-given scriptures which, if correctly interpreted, unify all Muslims. In other words, Islam is one. Ulama — the Islamic scholars — have been considered responsible for making the correct interpretations, and have thus, on one level, represented “true Islam.” However, there have also of course been internal battles between various groups of ulama about how to define Islam, but, even more importantly, groups of Muslims have developed alternative beliefs, practices and life strategies. This means that “Islam” has always been a much more complex phenomenon than any such “true” definitions have allowed. But as academic scholars have tended to focus on the same scriptures as ulama, they too have confirmed the idea of Islam as one unified system. The Arabist W. Montgomery Watt (1990 (1968)) gave his book the rather telling title “What is Islam?”, thus implying that an accurate answer could be given. Likewise he argues that in what he describes as “higher religions,” their “basic” plans may be “contained in lengthy scriptures” (ibid: 4). With a similar scriptural focus, Schacht claims that Sharia — Islamic law — represents the kernel of Islam (1964: 1).

Beliefs and practices without a scriptural basis have been categorized as belonging to Low Islam, Popular Islam, folk religion, or have even been described as un-Islamic. According to Watt, much of the resentment towards Sufism may, for example, be understood as assertions of “the pure Islamic vision,” which is based on what he labels “Quranic Islam” (1990: 189 (1968)). Accordingly, much of what actual Muslims believe and do has been excluded from academic descriptions of “Islam.” Carl W. Ernst (1997) argues that the search for “true Islam” has led to a disregard for the important and complex traditions of Sufism which frequently has been labelled “low Islam” or folk religion. Secondly, such dichotomizations seem also to have created false distinctions in the field. According to Ernst, there has never been a fixed boundary between Muslims engaging in so-called “Quranic Islam” and in Sufism; in many cases believers may do both without experiencing these in any way as oppositional activities. But the tendency to con-

sider certain texts as the basis for “true Islam” of course makes those Muslims who focus on them appear “more” Islamic than others. In Ernst’s view, this has led to an implicit support of, for example, the Islamists’ claim to represent “true Islam” because they claim to base their teachings on scriptures (ibid). On the other hand, wanting to protect the purity of Islam, some scholars have argued that the Islamists falsify the scriptural traditions.

The categorization of beliefs and practices as belonging either to high or low Islam also implies that individual believers may be classified as “higher or lower” Muslims. The fact that those *categorized* as “lower” Muslims very often belong to the lower classes and/or the female gender may surprise no one. The so-called popular aspects of the religious activities of the upper classes are very rarely described and taken into consideration. Thus, the dichotomy remains clearcut: the boundaries of class and type of religiosity run seemingly parallel.

In the case of women, the tendency to exclude their religious activities from what is supposedly Islamic supports the widespread idea that Islam has no real positions for women. Naturally, when Islam is defined according to what men, or rather *some* men, do and think, then Islam seems to provide rather bleak opportunities for women. However, numerous studies document the great scope of religious activities among Muslim women. While many of these are provided by anthropologists having observed what women, members of the lower classes, and others actually say and do, they, too, have tended to categorize their informants in the very same categories.

Due to the complexity of the Arabic language, and the great difference between spoken and written Arabic, many non-Arab anthropologists have been, and still are, illiterate (for a discussion of this point see, for example, Abu-Lughod 1989). Thus, they have had no direct access to Islamic scriptures themselves. On the other hand, due to anthropology’s traditional scant attention to historical and theological texts, many have apparently been satisfied with their literate colleagues’ claim as to what Islam really “is.” To put it simply, anthropologists have seemed to allow their more literate colleagues to monopolize “the true Islam”, and then concentrated on “the rest.” Such an atti-

tude may perhaps also explain why anthropologists have demonstrated so little interest in Islamists; perhaps they consider the Islamists out of reach for their own discipline because of their claim to represent “true Islam”; to be based on scriptures; and to be inspired by the historical founding period of Islam — claims which may appear to most anthropologists as no-go-signals.

However, due to the traditional division of work between the disciplines — texts versus observation; the dead versus the living; High Islam versus Low Islam; etc. — representations of the field have in many cases been distorted. Implicitly it has also led to support of an internal hierarchy among Muslims. The Muslims’ internal debate about “true Islam” has spilled over into academic scholarship and vice versa. Thus, academic boundaries have far too often been reproduced and represented as religious, social and gender boundaries within the field itself.

#### *Concluding Remarks*

In this paper I have described a specific division of work in the study of Islam. The story of its origin may of course be told in several ways. Canonized texts may — as previously mentioned, appear as concrete and “true” while observation data from street life may appear slippery and thus suspect; some are more filled with prestige than others. Additionally, to observe public and “completed” texts may seem more in line with dominant scientific norms about objectivity, than observing interaction in which one participates oneself. While academic boundaries may produce boundaries where none exist “out there,” it has also been an important point in this paper to demonstrate how such a division may mirror social and cultural structures in the field of research itself. A high valuation of canonized texts in the Islamic societies inherently gives a textual approach high prestige, while popular Islam — *seemingly* without any textual bases, — gives participatory methods a lower prestige. Thus one may claim that a methodological division is maintained and cemented due to preferences in the society under study. On the other hand, as demonstrated, academic boundaries may indirectly serve to strengthen the very same boundaries.

Naturally it is impossible to speak of unsurmountable barriers between anthropology and history of religion. Frequently one may find approaches which transcends the boundaries, but I have attempted to demonstrate how an emphasis on an “either — or” may distort the descriptions of a totality. Thus I may conclude with applauding a greater complementarity between textual methods and fieldwork. The question is however, what does such a complementarity entail?

I have described my personal wandering between anthropology and history of religions as a *triangulation in action*, — as a long and challenging process marked by inclusion and exclusion in various disciplinary circles. However, I do not think such a strategy is suitable for all and everyone. An alternative could be to shorten the wandering by establishing the thematic modules based on the history of religions — with its emphasis on textual analyses, and on anthropology with its emphasis on fieldwork methodology, etc. It may however, be doubtful whether such a shortened complementarity will give sufficient competence to really gain workable access to canonized texts, — or on the other hand, a sufficiently founded understanding of social processes, in order to engage in large independent social studies.

A somewhat different view on the dilemmas in relation to complementarity would involve renouncing such wanderings between different disciplines, by simply attempting to improve the communication between people already working within different traditions. The challenge would then be to diminish *strategic avoidance* and develop a greater openness vis-à-vis one's own and others' *tacitness*. This does not imply that one returns to the traditional division of work — only adding a dialogic dimension; rather it implies that one chooses the risk of engaging in a new learning process — of which the consequences are unknown.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

ROBERT JAY LIFTON, *Destroying the World to Save it. Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism* — New York: Henry Holt 1999 (374 p.) ISBN 0 805 05290 9 (cloth) US\$26.00. German edition: *Terror für die Unsterblichkeit. Erlösungssekten proben den Weltuntergang*. Translated by Udo Rennert and Ursula Gräfe — München: Hanser 2000 (389 p.) ISBN 3-446-19879-2 (cloth) DM 49.80.

On March 5, 1995, *Aum* followers released the deadly organophosphorous nerve gas, sarin, in five over-crowded trains in Tokyo's underground system. They were carrying out the instructions of their master, Shoko Asahara, who founded the religious movement *Aum Shinrikyo* in 1984. With this gas attack they had hoped to trigger off a catastrophe which would end in the complete destruction of the world. With only eleven dead and five thousand casualties (some seriously injured), the apocalyptic operation was in the eyes of the perpetrators a failure. The master and other leading members of the sect were taken to court. However, the Japanese authorities did not succeed in crushing the movement. Under a new name, *Alpha*, *Aum Shinrikyo* still exerts a powerful influence. *Alpha*, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, was intended to mark a new religious beginning; nevertheless the new leader, Fumihori Joyu, remains faithful to the apocalyptic visions of his old guru.

It is easy to dismiss *Aum Shinrikyo*'s murderous campaign as a symptom of fundamentalist delusion. However, the situation is far more complicated. The religious murderers in Tokyo's underground had studied at Japanese elitist universities and many had socially oriented or medical professions. Among them was a highly educated heart surgeon who had become famous for his sensitivity when dealing with patients. In particular the medics of this religious movement have exhibited a highly criminal energy. In opposition to western medicine, which they criticise for being one-sidedly rationalistic, they have not only developed new therapies, but also institutionalised an alternative understanding of death: only through death, they claim, can the impure human being find a pure and spiritually fulfilled life. Murder then becomes an altruistic act, the ultimate therapy in the interests of the victim.

Robert Jay Lifton, professor of psychiatry and psychology and Director of the *Center on Violence and Human Survival* at the City University of New York, has for a number of years studied the role of medics in the violent religious history of the modern age. In his psychograph of *Aum Shinrikyo* he raises the old question as to the mental framework of religiously motivated violence. Besides press reports and court records, Lifton also draws on interviews with former *Aum* members as source material. Lifton understands the strong presence of religious movements in the late twentieth century as the symptom of a crisis of modern societies and their loss of morality which he believes to be an elementary experience of modern men and women. For this reason, everyone of us is potentially prone to develop a 'fundamentalistic self' which, when bound to a charismatic religious authority, will find those stable certainties one seeks in the chaotic world of modern pluralism.

The question is: how does someone become a charismatic authority? Lifton's argumentation is based on the model of a spiralling psycho-dynamic relationship between the guru and his disciples. Anchored to a leader, the disciple finds a way of overcoming his insecure self. In turn, the guru can secure his charisma through the increasingly excessive worship of those who believe in him. The guru experiences himself as holy because he is revered as such. His worshippers have faith in his religious mission because he acts as the 'Chosen One'.

Lifton has little to contribute to what we already know about the master's life which began in 1955. A half-blind boy attends a school for the blind and sees himself as the strong and superior man in comparison with his completely blind class-mates. Enthused by the theatre, this pupil fantasises, projecting himself into all conceivable positions of power. Later he became a successful businessman in a herb pharmacy, selling false natural products. This career was brought to an abrupt end when he was arrested for fraud, which led to a crisis and religious awakening. At the age of twenty-six, he joined a religious group which fused elements of the New Age from the 'human potential movement' and applied neurology with Buddhist traditions. Here he became acquainted with the writings of French astrologers and the physician, Nostradamus, who prophesised the end of the world at the turn of the third millennium. From this time on, Nostradamus's writings, of which over four hundred editions were published in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, became an important source of his apocalyptic visions.

In 1985, Asahara becomes a popular religious media star. A photo session with the Dalai Lama suggests religious respectability. In the cold north of Japan, he has a vision of a deity who consecrates him 'the God of Light who leads the heavenly hosts' in the last great war to destroy all darkness and guides the chosen ones into the *Shambala* (a Buddhist eschaton or heaven where spiritually fulfilled souls find peace). In spite of the military imagery, initially this vision of the pending Last Judgement is merely a naive pacifistic ideology on the inner transformation of Japanese society through the power of a pious witness and his testimony. While global conflagration is considered to be an inevitability, at first Asahara and his disciples expect it in the form of a Third World War, triggered off by the Americans. Only later do they see themselves as those chosen to signalise the Last Judgement. Asahara sends a philological task force to France, to the end of proving that according to the original writings of Nostradamus the return of the Messiah is destined to take place in Japan around 1990. Within a few years, this small, but extremely disciplined organisation of 1400 followers was able to secure a gigantic capital stock of approximately one billion dollars, had attempted to buy nuclear warheads in Russia, developed biological and chemical weapons, infiltrated the computer networks of numerous Japanese businesses and administrative offices, and financed their own radio programmes.

In great detail, Lifton describes the repressive climate in the sect's monasteries. At first Asahara had propagated the sexual liberation of the self; then, however, he backed radical asceticism from which he himself was exempt by virtue of his god-like authority and purity. The only guarantee for surviving the Final Judgement was to unite oneself with the master. For this reason, Asahara's medics experimented with electrodes which were allegedly designed to transfer the Eminence's brain waves to smaller, but wealthy minds. In order to cast off bad karma, one can buy a litre of the master's bath water for a thousand dollars and drink it as a medicine. For ten thousand dollars one can participate in a blood initiation which mediates the saving power of a few drops of the Lord's holy blood. Fanaticism regarding the boundless possibilities of science, age-old myths of redemption, cultic authoritarianism, and popular comics on the threat of aliens and the world's deliverance through the services of courageous Japanese musclemen are blended using modern collage techniques into a dualistic world view.

Lifton traces Japan's criminal apocalyptic prophecies and their technofantasies back to the 'striking features of the Japanese self', 'the absolute

status of the collective and fearless Japanese machismo to the death'. These psychological speculations on the 'present-day personality structures' of the Japanese people belong to the weaker passages of this study which is, incidentally, also badly translated into German. Lifton's expansive claims culminate in a trivial moral demand: to change the psychological and historical conditions which lead to destructiveness and criminality. Is this psychiatrist also a split personality? He describes the sudden change from virtue to violence and yet makes a moral appeal. Some academic interpretations of religion are themselves only part and parcel of the religious history of the modern age.

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JAN G. PLATVOET and ARIE L. MOLENDIJK (Eds.), *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion. Contexts, Concepts, and Contests*. Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 84 — Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill 1999 (543 p.) ISBN 90-04-11544 7 (cloth) US\$ 118.00.

Arie L. Molendijk notes in the Introduction (Part I) to this volume ("In Defence of Pragmatism") that this book is the product of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions' (LISOR) commitment to reconsider the problem of the definition of religion not only in the light of the voluminous literature on the subject but also, and especially, in order "to come to grips with societal developments, and . . . with the transformations of religion(s) in (late) modernity" (p. 7) that have put previous definitions of the concept under considerable stress. For the scholars connected with LISOR, the deinstitutionalization of religion and the emergence of New Age and individualistic religiosities have revealed the limitations of past definitions of 'religion,' and the vacuity of "the hope of finding a common methodological and theoretical framework . . ." (p. 8) for the study of religion. And the authors included here, Molendijk maintains, believe a more pragmatic approach to the definitional problem is possible without risking the descent into a Feyerabendian chaos (p. 17).

The editors have organized the papers here under several headings, with those in Parts II and III bearing directly on the theme outlined by Molendijk in the Introduction. The papers in Part III (chapters 6-9), for example, provide

a history of the meaning and use of the concept of religion and focus special attention on the conceptual changes that have occurred in its use in the West and those in Part II, for the most part, attempt to show that appropriate and useful definitions are those tailored to specific disciplinary contexts or special extra-academic concerns. The essays in Parts IV (Methodological Issues, chapters 10-14) and V (Definition Proposals, chapters 15-19) also contribute to the same theme, but many of them go beyond merely definitional concerns and so add a broader sweep to the debate connected to the definitional concerns.

The papers by Ernst Feil (“‘Religio’ and ‘Religion’ in the 18th Century”), Arie L. Molendijk (“Shifting Cargoes: Ernst Troeltsch on the Study of Religion”), Wouter W. Belier “The Sacred in the Social Sciences: On the Definition of Religion by the *Année sociologique* Group”) and David M. Wulff (“Psychologists Define Religion”) provide interesting reviews of the historical development of the concept ‘religion’ in Western scholarship. Feil claims that the modern notion of ‘religion’ that emerged with Schleiermacher has created considerable difficulties for the science of religion and maintains — given this conception of ‘religion’ — “that the ‘time of religion’ is over” (p. 129). Molendijk comes to a similar conclusion at the end of his analysis of Troeltsch’s theologically motivated concern with ‘religion.’ Molendijk believes that he has shown here that a trans-historical definition of religion is not possible, that no general definition is possible, and that scholars in Religious Studies will from now on have to work at the level of observable particularities, as he puts it (p. 167). On reviewing the quest for a definition of religion by psychologists over the past century, David Wulff — even though finding a convergence of scholarly opinion on the need for ‘religion’ to be defined operationally — concludes that the resulting definitions were neither empirically successful nor philosophically justifiable (p. 217), and he maintains, therefore, that the concept is becoming increasingly unusable (p. 220). Wouter Belier’s paper is not as harsh in its view on definition of religion; he notes, however, that although the *Année sociologique* group rejected individual psychology as a point of departure for the study of religion and agreed that it must be studied as a social phenomenon (p. 201) that it must be acknowledged that sociology for this group was not a value-free enterprise and that the resulting definition with which it worked, therefore, was not a neutral analytical tool.

The papers in Part II argue for more limited, pragmatic uses of the definition of 'religion.' James Beckford's "The Politics of Defining Religion in Secular Society," and Massimo Introvigne's "Religion as Claim," for example, show how religion is often defined by competing interest groups for political advantage rather than for scholarly purposes. Introvigne calls these ethno-definitions and writes: "Their function is not to increase knowledge about religion, but to solve specific legal, fiscal, political, or social problems" (p. 68). Both these authors also point out, therefore, that the scholar must be sensitive to political issues, and to undertake their scholarly work cognizant of broader societal concerns. Danièle Hervieu-Léger's "Religion as Memory" contributes to the theme of pragmatism in the definition of religion in that it argues that the modern scholar of religion must abandon the notion of a strict opposition between traditional and modern societies (p. 77) and transcend the classical debate between substantive and functional definition. He claims that the modern scholar ought to seek not to fix 'religion' once and for all, but rather "to designate the axes of transformation around which the object reconstructs itself" (p. 84). A definition of 'religion,' that is, must take into account the "mobility of the modern act of believing . . ." (p. 87). And Jacob A. Belzen also argues that it is highly unlikely that 'religion' "will ever be comprehended under one conclusively and universally valid definition of religions" (pp. 96-7), and he counsels that scholars take to talking rather about "religiosity" (and spirituality) — that is, about human involvement in religion (p. 100).

Despite Jan Platvoet's paper ("To Define or Not to Define") in Part III of this volume — which supports the arguments in the Introduction and Parts I and II — the remaining papers here seem to run at cross-purposes to the thematic concerns of the book as a whole. Platvoet certainly thinks a universally valid definition of 'religion' impossible (pp. 247, 255) and claims that defining 'religion' is not essential to providing solid work in Religious Studies (p. 252). However, he claims that definitions can be helpful if they are structured as "neutral instruments for elucidating, and safeguarding, the huge diversity of 'religion' in the religions of humankind" (p. 255). Hendrik Johan Adriaanse's paper ("On Defining Religion"), on the other hand, attempts to provide a normative definition of "religion as such" (p. 236) for use by those in the moral sciences and the humanities (p. 238). And André Droogers' paper on "Play, Methodological Ludism and the Definition of Religion" goes even further in arguing that "ludism" allows for another kind of (stereophonic)

thinking (which he calls “articulation”) that will allow for the resolution of problems both scientific and religious (p. 290). James L. Cox’s “Intuiting Religion” which argues for a preliminary intuitive definition of religion that “provides the essential initial stage for the completion of scholarly investigation because it clarifies the field of study and promotes a flexible, but rational research agenda” (p. 283), however, appears to draw attention back to the needs of the scientific study of religion, as does the contribution by Jan A.M. Snoek (“Defining ‘Religions’ as the Domain of Study of the Empirical Sciences of Religion”) who makes a solid case for a non-essentialist, etic definition of ‘religions’ (p. 328).

The papers in Part V constitute a “mixed bag” of positions. Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s “Defining Religion in Spite of History” in which he approaches the definition of religion and the sacred “as intellectual artefacts invested in particular socio-cultural contexts” (p. 364), complements the thematic concerns of LISOR expressed by Molendijk, as does Hetty Zock’s “Religion as the Realization of Faith” in which she argues against the possibility of a general definition of religion and for a definition of ‘religious persons,’ (for the function of religion in human life) (p. 433). Peter Byrne’s “The Definition of Religion: Squaring the Circle,” in which he argues for a general moral definition of religion (p. 385), and Meerten B. ter Borg’s “What is Religion,” in which he claims that “[r]eligiosity is an inalienable attribute of Man” (p. 399) seem to express older concerns in the definitional debate. Jeppe Sinding Jensen’s “On a Semantic Definition of Religion” does the same, but in a more scientific vein, and so complements the more traditional scientific/theoretical concerns implicit in Snoek’s contribution.

Part VI of this volume is an Epilogue by Jan Platvoet entitled “Contexts, Concepts, and Contexts: Towards a Pragmatics of Defining ‘Religion’ ” which recalls the readers attention to the title of the book. Although the reader might expect in this chapter an editorial rehearsal of the LISOR project, one gets rather a continuation of Platvoet’s own contribution to the definition questions in chapter 11. After recounting the (Western) development of the notion ‘religion,’ Platvoet argues not only that a universally valid definition of religion is neither feasible nor desirable because “scholars of religion are as context-bound as are the religions they study” (p. 512) and because religion is polymorphous and multi-functional (p. 510), but also that the attempt to integrate the various sciences of religions is not possible. He therefore advocates “a pragmatic, anti-essentialist and anti-hegemonic approach to

defining 'religion' and 'religions' as the core concepts of the Science(s) of Religion(s)" (p. 463). Whether Platvoet escapes the Feyerabendian chaos to which his co-editor Molendijk referred in the Introduction, however, is a very pertinent question.

These sustained analyses of and reflections on the question of the definition of 'religion' are a valuable contribution to understanding the nature of Religious Studies as an academic/scientific discipline in the context of the modern (research) university. There is a large measure of agreement among the authors as to the problems created for understanding the object of that study by transformations in late modern society and the recommendation that scholars recognize that a broad variety of definitions of religion can be legitimately proposed is not without solid support. The suggestion in a number of the papers, however, that a more general definition of 'religion' that allows of a scientific understanding of religions trans-culturally and trans-temporally, so to speak, is impossible, and that an integrated science of religion is also, therefore, impossible, has not found a solid footing in the arguments made here. Definitions of aspects of religion (or religions) for limited purposes are not mutually exclusive (or ought not to be) and do not, therefore, entail the impossibility of a more general definition of religion as classically understood. But these are not matters to be debated in a review. Whatever the limitations or deficiencies, however, this volume of essays ought to be widely consulted by scholars in Religious Studies and the social scientific study of religion interested in understanding the nature of the enterprise in which they are engaged.

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DONALD WIEBE

ARTHUR VERSLUIS, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (SUNY series in Western Esoteric Tradition) — Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1999 (xiv, 370 p.) ISBN 0-7914-4330-2 (pbk.) US\$ 25.95.

The academic and public picture of protestantism usually is not colored by mystic or esoteric currents but rather — especially in the Weberian sense — by innerworldly asceticism and the refutation of magical concepts. In

this book, Arthur Versluis depicts protestantism in a totally different way. Focusing mainly on Jakob Böhme and his followers in Germany, Britain, and North America, he presents the history and impact of a kind of esoteric protestantism that has been widely neglected so far.

The first part discusses the life and biographical contexts of Böhme, Johann Georg Gichtel, John Pordage, Jane Leade and the Philadelphians, Dionysius Andreas Freher and his colleagues, Johannes Kelpius and his theosophical community in Pennsylvania, and Christopher Walton's theosophical college. After summarizing the central issues of (Böhme's) theosophical doctrines in part two and highlighting the art of the soul's transmutation in part three, the author deals with the historical contexts of theosophy, namely gnosticism, alchemy, magic, astrology, and mystical chivalry. There, he unfolds an impressive richness of this Christian spirituality, culminating in the main thesis that although there are definite links to mystical and philosophical currents in late antiquity, "theosophy is based fundamentally in direct spiritual knowledge." The theosophers' doctrines come "directly out of their own visionary experiences, and if there are parallels with these previous traditions, the parallels are confirmatory rather than solely influential" (p. 151).

In order to illuminate the visionary path of the soul's transmutation Versluis uses the object language in such a manner that the distinction between the author and his topic is blurred. Although this trope might be appropriate to show the personal mystical dimensions of protestant theosophy, it is methodologically problematic. As a result, *Wisdom's Children* is a kind of manifesto, a sympathetic account of the "higher knowledge, which has been ignored throughout modernity, [which] may offer even today the keys to the qualitative transformation of the human world" (p. 246). Time and again the (Christian) reader is encouraged to use her or his own visionary abilities because "[c]oming to understand Böhme is an existential, not just intellectual process" (p. 129). Naturally, this approach leads to a phenomenological emphasis on "archetypal truths" (see p. 252) and the "essence of religion" that can only be experienced inwardly (p. 167), whereas historical criticism vanishes more and more. The meditative text at times itself exemplifies what Antoine Faivre has called the 'praxis of concordance.' It uses quite different religious phenomena — Zen Buddhism (p. 21), shamanism (p. 10), Mahayana (p. 76), Russian Orthodoxy, Taoism, and Tantra (p. 161-3), to mention but a few — to make its point that protestant theosophy is a way to the spiritual center of all Christianity.

Hence, for the academic reader the strong parts of *Wisdom's Children* are the vivid descriptions of Böhman thought and its impact on later mystical discourse within protestant denominations in Europe and America, whereas the text's theological ductus will mainly attract readers of the Christian faith.

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### *Periodicals*

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BUDDHIST ART AND NARRATIVE

*Richard S. Cohen*, Kinsmen of the Son: Śākyabhikṣus and the Institutionalization of the Bodhisattva Ideal

*Jacob N. Kinnard*, The Polyvalent *Pādas* of Viṣṇu and the Buddha

*Wendi L. Adamek*, Robes Purple and Gold: Transmission of the Robe in the *Lidai fabao ji*

*Alan L. Miller*, Spiritual Accomplishment by Misdirection: Some *Upāya* Folktales from East Asia

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*Joel Hecker*, Eating Gestures and the Ritualized Body in Medieval Jewish Mysticism

*Carole A. Myscofski*, The Magic of Brazil: Practice and Prohibition in the Early Colonial Period, 1590-1620

Book reviews

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(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

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#### EDITORS' NOTE

Comparison forms an indispensable presupposition for the history of religions. Without comparison there is no "religion" and without "religion" there is no history of religions. The theory and methods of comparison, however, continue to be controversial. This issue of *Numen* contains papers presented during two sessions entitled "Comparativism then and now: Stocktaking and critical issues in the formation of cross-cultural knowledge," held at the XVIIIth World Congress of the IAHR, in Durban, South Africa, August 5-12, 2000. They are offered here as documentation of the current debate over the comparative method, with contributions in retrospective as well as programmatic modes.

It should be pointed out that the Durban congress was also reflected in *Numen* 48.2, which contained the plenary address given by Jonathan Z. Smith, "A Twice-Told Tale: The History of the History of Religions' History," transmitted to the congress by video broadcast.

## UNIVERSALS, GENERAL TERMS AND THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

JEPPE SINDING JENSEN

### *Summary*

A comparative study of religion rests on comparison and generalization. Both require that the object of study, the subject matters of various religions have something in common — certain properties that warrant their juxtaposition in analyses. If they had *nothing* in common, “the study” of religion would not make any sense. But it seemingly does, thus “religions” presumably form a subject matter with certain regularities. Such regularities may be “emic universals” on the level of socio-cultural formations and they may be “etic universals” on the levels of the analysts’ stock of general terms — and the two levels are connected. This article focuses mainly on the role of universals as general concepts in method and theory, i.e., on the status and use of etic level generalizations such as models, maps, metaphors that are constructed in order to explain and make sense, as general terms, of emic level entities, properties, functions, structures etc. The last part concerns the use of universals in four modes of comparison of material, cognitive and symbolic matters.

Scholars in the study of religion often voice opinions sceptical of universals and of “things” universal in religion and religions.<sup>1</sup> Although particular religions may be referred to as “universes,” there is little room for universals as these are considered either pan-human, psychological or biological and thus uninteresting, or inadmissible because they suggest reference to some universal religion or theology. So sceptical views of universals may be expressed for very different reasons. Typically, it is acknowledged that earlier attempts at comparing religions did so on the wrong grounds, using speculative philosophical or indigenous Christian theological categories as universals, ill-fitting

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term “universal” is used in accordance with general philosophical usage — to be explained below — rather than as a term in the social sciences; cf. on that difference the contributions in the present issue by Saler and Paden.

as they might have been, and that scholars valorized “other” religions on scales of relative worth and “fulfilment.” Among those who theologically represented “unique traditions,” the term “universal” normally meant that their own views ought to be universally accepted, but “universals” could also suggest that their own uniqueness was in danger, that their own privileged essences and pristine origins were comparable to something else or could be viewed as just another instance of something general. Few adherents of religions accept the idea that their own tradition is “just one more world-view,” and it takes more than an above-average ecumenical attitude to accept that one may learn something about one’s own tradition by learning about those of others.

Later, in historical as well as in anthropological studies of religion, particularism was one way out of the “problem of universals” — so that students in later and more critical empirical research modes might end up by knowing “more and more about less and less.” The grand universalist attitudes of evolutionist “armchair anthropologists” and theological universalists were supplanted by rigorous philological studies in singular traditions or in detailed ethnographies; in both, precision and exactitude were the ideals, rather than comparison and generalization.<sup>2</sup> Against detailed empirical studies comparative studies are always bound to get something wrong, to be too general and superficial. In that sense the critique from particularists and empiricists is justified, but such critique may serve the wrong purpose and be based on the wrong premises.

Consequently, to most scholars (historical, anthropological and sociological etc.) in the study of religion in the latter half of the 20th century, the very term “universal” has connoted theology, conjured ideas of a global revelation of the “Sacred,” or suggested speculations on

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. the concise overview of the fate of “comparative religion” in Smith et al. (eds.) 1995, 276-279. The attitudes towards universals in mainstream anthropology are reviewed and critically assessed in Brown 1991, 1-7 and ch. 3, 54-87. Brown remarks that the “... skepticism and neglect of human universals is the entrenched legacy of an era of ‘era of particularism’ in which the observation that something *doesn’t* occur among the Bongo Bongo counted as a major contribution to anthropology” (1991, 1).

the psychological tribulations of the sub-conscious. Thus, if “universals” were not directly epistemologically dangerous (in the sense of “skewing visions”), then, at least, they would be deemed vacuous and trivial — as they had nothing to contribute to the study of religion as a methodologically sound academic enterprise. To the more empirically minded, it was obvious that religions only come in the plural, as do cultures, languages, economies and political systems. For, as the argument runs, although some religions may share some ancestry, descent, genealogy etc., they are all — as we know them — singular instantiations of historical contingency, and this calls for a recognition, if not celebration, of “cultural autonomy” and the multifariousness of human social activities.<sup>3</sup> One might suspect that such notes of reservation concerning things universal are meant, by those skeptical of universals, to cover *all* of those multifarious activities and thus indicate that they *do* (after all) have something “deeply rooted” in common — but not so.<sup>4</sup> One need not give much heed to the post-modern fascination with contingency and difference because of the seemingly endless variations of cultural forms.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the world is multi-cultural and the study of it

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the “Two arguments against studying recurrent features” presented in Boyer’s exposition (1994, 6-7) of the stance against “universals.” Boyer demonstrates how a large measure of the critique rests on confusions between universals and recurrent features as well as between processes and their outcome. Boyer also notes 1) the frequent mistake of distinguishing cultural invariants based on, say, biology and the rest, and 2) the presupposition that if some traits are widespread — but not universal — then they fall outside a general theory of religion. On the relations between theses based on cognitive psychology and cultural constructivism, see McCauley 2000. Proponents of cognitive science have tended to disregard “culture,” but culture and cognition obviously come together, as is emphasized by Hutchins (1995, 353-374).

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., in a recent publication J.G. Platvoet’s reservations (1999, 250-1) that resound throughout the many contributions in that volume.

<sup>5</sup> The case against universals in the study of religion may be couched in more philosophical idiom, as when Mark C. Taylor opines that: “Hegel’s insistence that categories, which make knowledge possible, are historical and not universal represents a significant corrective to Kant’s critical philosophy. . . . If one is not committed to the principles of philosophical idealism, it is possible to identify alternative structures

multi-disciplinary, but as long as we are able to argue about all the multiplicities, we must also share some forms of language. The acceptance of the existence of surface differences among societies, cultures, and religious traditions does not necessarily entail a surrender to doctrines of incommensurability, incompatibility, or incomparability on the part of the scholar.<sup>6</sup> One of the problems in the discussions concerning universals is that they have frequently been considered the opposite of history, namely “eternal,” but such dualism is itself a product of history. It is then more interesting to attempt to explain why it is that the human ability to have or to *make* history in itself requires the existence of universals. Anything that is historically specific and culturally relative is so only because it is a human product and therefore comparable — even the most historicist and relativist study is only possible on the premises of the “psychic unity” of humankind. Universals warrant comparability, but they do not entail or imply identity.

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of knowledge. Rather than positing a universal grid or seamless organism, critical reflection articulates an incomplete web of open and flexible terms. This seamy network of constraints constitutes a constantly shifting cultural *a priori* that renders critical knowledge possible while circumscribing its unavoidable limits” (1998, 17). Descriptively, this is a reasonable account of matters, but normatively — on what should be considered “universals” — it is inadequate also because the universals in the statement itself are not considered. On behalf of the contributors to that volume, Taylor proclaims that “. . . we insist that every cultural *a priori* that renders knowledge possible and interpretation necessary is always incomplete” (1998, 18). Only fundamentalists would disagree.

<sup>6</sup> The “soft” version of this programme warns us that we may be grossly misrepresenting religion by using *our* concepts — usually as our “construction”: “Although ‘religion,’ therefore, has been virtually a universal phenomenon in all societies throughout history so far, it can be shown to have existed in most societies and periods of history only analytically, by us applying to them our modern Western concepts . . .” (Platvoet 1999, 25). Rodney Needham’s reflections on these issues in anthropology are highly interesting, cf. his “Polythetic classification,” in 1983, 26–65. In the field of the history of religions, J.Z. Smith’s long-known (but not his own) dictum that “map is not territory” seems not to have been fully recognized for its implications: Religion is — if anything at all — no “thing” but a concept made of other concepts and no concept ever was a “thing.” Therefore there is no way in which to talk about religion “un-analytically.”

However, before proceeding, it should be specified what philosophers normally mean by the term “universals.” A standard example of a “definition” says:

A universal is a property or relation that can be instanced, or instantiated, by a number of different particular things: each yellow thing provides an instance of the property of yellowness, and each square thing the property of being square. The things covered by a universal are thus similar in some respect. The general questions asked about universals include: are they discovered or invented? How are we to think of something that has itself no spatial position, yet is instanced at many places and times? What is the relation of instantiation? Can sharing the same property be analysed in terms of resemblance? How does the mind perceive the general property as well as the particular instance of it?<sup>7</sup>

Concerning the nature of universals as properties and relations it is genuinely important to clarify whether the reference is to 1) ontological universals: that they *really* exist and are in the things, e.g. the redness in strawberries; or to 2) epistemological universals: that strawberries are red *for us humans only*; or to 3) theoretical/methodological universals: that given certain conventions (including scholarly ones) about colours, and fruits, and for the sake of reasonable communication, we accept the idea that calling strawberries red serves us better.<sup>8</sup> This is, of course, the perennial problem “with universals” in philoso-

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<sup>7</sup> Example from Simon Blackburn’s *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (1994, 387). On the kinds of universals and the discussions concerning them, see brief overview in Armstrong 1995. According to standard philosophical practice the issue of universals is placed in the “companion” volume to metaphysics. Scholars of religion of the critical kind tend to confuse “metaphysics” with theology.

<sup>8</sup> The “redness” of strawberries can, as we know “of course,” be explained scientifically as a property or disposition to absorb and emit light on a certain range of wavelengths, and is thus a theoretical universal that comes close to being an ontological universal, but its “validity” is internal to a certain scientific paradigm (cf. Putnam’s “internal realism”). Strawberries of other colours simply aren’t ripe (although still strawberries). These days they could also be genetically modified and “look like” tomatoes. Theoretical/methodological universals are related to, and may be seen as extensions of, epistemological universals in that they are products of and consequential for our ways of dealing with things, materially and immaterially. What belongs to what and resembles what is also a function of the theories we have and

phy, where the traditional debates questioned whether universals exist before things (*ante rem*), are discovered in things (*in re*), or are “invented” after things (*post rem*).

*Emic universals*

“Religion” is one questioned “universal.” It may well be a construction, an abstraction and a fiction, but were it not for the compelling cognitive power of that persuasive — and universal — fiction, the present publication would not make much sense.<sup>9</sup> There can be no study of religion, or of anything else, if universals are not allowed to enter the discourse. This observation is not an argument about or a defense for an idea of transcendental, divine and other-wordly universals on a (putative) level of supernatural ontology. Nor does it simply refer to bio-neurological, psychological or cognitive universals on the levels of physicalist or materialist ontology. In the humanities and the social sciences it is a common conviction that human “universals” are such ubiquitous behavioural invariables that are *not* conditioned by history, that is, they are aspects of behaviour that have biological and psychological properties, and thus scientifically interesting only to biologists and psychologists.<sup>10</sup> But behavioural entities so desig-

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the ways in which we apply them, and this is not restricted to scientific activities, it is rather a prominent feature of the ways in which we make our “worlds.”

<sup>9</sup> Platvoet (1999, 251), again, provides an example: “The foregoing arguments expose the idea of a universally valid definition of ‘religion’ as a recent Western idiosyncrasy. It cannot serve as the paradigm for an explanation of the religious history of humankind, but must itself be explained as a contingent development in that history.” Obviously so, but does this mean that things with a history cannot serve as normative concepts? Can only “things” from outside history be judged as valid? The epistemological consequences of such assumptions are self-defeating to the historicist position. “Religion” as a Western construct certainly had its share of complicity in mission and colonialism etc., but so had, e.g., “economics” — but very few seem to want to discard that notion. Why is it that “religion” is such a problem? To my mind it is certainly preferable to “spiritual path,” “faith,” “philosophy of life,” “world-view” — or “ultimate concern.”

<sup>10</sup> As the more or less theological assumptions concerning the religion-ness of religion as consisting in a true transcendent reference or a true universal essence are

nated should rather be considered recurrent behavioural phenomena and the term “universals” reserved for application in accordance with philosophical concerns in order to avoid undue terminological confusion. Recurrent behavioural phenomena may be termed “universals” on condition that they do exhibit universals in the sense of properties and relations. In fact, most recurrent forms of behaviour do so, but it is important to stress that it is not the behaviour as such that is “universal” but aspects of it — and, again, with certain properties and relations.

Recurrent features and properties of human behaviour might, in all probability, also be claimed on other levels than the most basic physiological, biological and psychological. Although “higher-level” behavioural features, say culture-specific institutions, may require lower-level, e.g. cognitive, explanations to account for their existence and functions, they do not “disappear” as a result of being so explained. Psychology does not “go away” because the functions of the brain are mostly electric; no one of sound mind would leave psychology to low-voltage engineering. Thus, the ontology of social and cultural entities is not threatened by the fact that they may be explained as the results of cognitive phenomena and functions. And this also affects the issue of universals, for they may “exist” (“literature” or “text”) irrespective of what the subject matter may be reduced to (“paper” and “ink blots”).<sup>11</sup>

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not allowed in historical-critical scholarship, it seems obvious that commonalities and resemblances among “religions” must be explained by human properties, and obvious candidates among those are psychological and cognitive mechanisms, functions etc., as the logical corollary of the thesis of pan-human psychic unity which forms the epistemological backbone of all historical inquiry. As attractive as this strategy seems, it is lodged in subjectivist philosophy and there could be other possibilities, i.e. the one I am advocating here: that a perspective on the basis of a philosophy of language can warrant the existence of universals in semiotic and semantic constructions — somewhere “between God and the molecules.”

<sup>11</sup> The discussions about reductionism in the study of religion are extensive, if not prolix, but they tend to centre on theological agendas and “insider-outsider” problematics more than theoretical questions see, e.g., McCutcheon (ed.) 1999. In the sciences, the problems of reduction and explanation are closely linked, see McCauley 1999. On the vexed questions of the explanation and reduction of human intentionality and psychology, see the interesting discussion in Stich 1996.

There must be universals *in* socio-cultural entities for them to be what they are (i.e. if we hold them to have the property of being socio-cultural), thus the universals employed in analyses of these matters are not purely external and in that sense nominalist. Most of the nominalizing suffixes “-hood,” “-ness,” and “-ity” point to the “ways” in which social actions and relations are construed. Some are notoriously difficult as general terms, for they do of course also vary culturally — “parenthood,” “holiness” and “modernity” to mention just a few — and mostly they are what we decide to call them. The circularity or tautological character of this kind of argument should not cause too much alarm, as it is a very simple point that for human contrivances and constructs to have cognitive and thus cultural and social importance they must somehow be rule-governed, shaped along cognitive schemata; they must have properties and functions, be embedded in structures etc., most of which are non-material or non-physical. Human social and cultural constructs are the products of intentional actors with certain concerns, but once the products are “released” into the world they more or less lead their own lives and feed back upon what produced them.<sup>12</sup>

It is a fact that a good many cultures, societies etc. have “no word” for this or that: “religion” is one example with which we are familiar, but “economy” could be another, or “society” or “language.” All of these are things constructed, mostly even unconsciously and collectively so, but in such manners that they exhibit discernible patterns, functions and properties so that they become re-cognizable, not only by “the learned,” but by any human who has been informed

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<sup>12</sup> In the social sciences it has been a perpetual problem how to relate the abstract systems of knowledge to individual (and collective) behaviour. That discussion has not yet been carried out in much detail in relation to the study of religion — the “pragmatists” and the “idealists” do not seem to meet and agree easily. One of the very basic questions in that respect is whether one proceeds from a) a collectivist/holist or b) an individualist/particularist methodology — this will in turn fundamentally affect the nature and scope of “universals.” Where a) may look to the total structural complex of a set of ritual actions, b) may investigate the mental representations of individual participants — the difference of perspective is obviously crucial.

about them: Word patterns, action sequences, social structures — all those “things” that make up conventions — must meet the demands of human cognition.<sup>13</sup> Despite all surface irregularity, social and cultural phenomena exhibit some regularities and other “metaphysical” properties that render them worthy of being assigned the designation “universal.”

*On the “non-thingyness” of universals*

In any science, the issue of universals is intimately tied the problem of directions and levels of reduction: The level of reduction serves as a metaphysical “station” on the scale of inquiry and the question of reduction becomes one of choice as to where the analysis should end. Hence the problem of universals in the human and social sciences is theory-choice dependable: Universals are under-determined by particulars, universals are not empirical things.<sup>14</sup> They are also not so-called “natural kinds” — for of natural kinds there are very few: probably only “quarks” and a few other items relatively uninteresting to the study of religion “really” (in the physicist’s ontology) deserve

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<sup>13</sup> On just how socio-cultural products must “adapt” to the requirements of minds, see Terrence Deacon’s humorous inversion of the arguments on the problems concerning the universality of abstract rules of grammar and syntax and the amazement of how easily infants acquire these rules. Deacon argues that we “. . . do not need to turn to a theory of innate linguistic knowledge to explain them. They can be understood as the products of convergent social evolutionary trends, as spontaneous parallel adaptations of language structure to the unavoidable and ubiquitous limitations and biases provided by human brains, especially children’s brains. Languages have adapted to human brains and human brains have adapted to languages, but the rate of language change is hundreds or thousands of times more rapid than biological change.” Also: “The brain has co-evolved with respect to language, but languages have done most of the adapting” (1997, 122).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., reduction of religion to a cognitive level “produces” cognitive universals; reduction to a social level produces “social universals” such as relations between social types and religions. Consider, e.g., the old, tested, and regrettably almost forgotten book by Swanson (1960): The universality lies in the qualities and correlations — not in the sense that the end products must be ubiquitous.

the label “natural kind.”<sup>15</sup> The commonsense idea that “universals” are identical things that must be discoverable all over the world is an illusion produced by the “reifying” modes of “Western” thought. It is a category mistake to substantialize “universals,” but the workings of our “intuitive” epistemology appear to demand of their ontology that they must be identical “things found glistening on the beach.” If not, they “don’t exist” or they are suspected to be deceptive, fake, false, forlorn and something other than they seem. The idea is also familiar from the study of religion: “there is no religion — only social action,” “no religious experience — only neurons firing,” but likewise one could say, about chairs: “there are no chairs — only sums of molecules.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus universals are not empirical objects operating in empirical mechanisms, but they are the properties of entities, complexes, processes, functions, and structures. They are the predicates that may apply to more than one thing and *none* of these predicates is a “physical” item of the world. I shall not elaborate on such concepts as “identity,” “class,” “resemblance,” “difference” — for what are *they* if not

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<sup>15</sup> The term “natural kind” does denote various items in various fields — they are not so natural: In cognitive psychology, for instance, horses, ducks and chairs serve as the “natural kinds” of human cognition, intuitive classifications etc. (as they did for Aristotle).

<sup>16</sup> The “sum of molecules”-story is an argument from the school of Polish mereologists, taken up by Putnam (1987, 16-21, 33-40) in a discussion of his programme for an “internal realism.” Interesting for the present purpose is Putnam’s reasoning: “Internal realism says that the notion of a ‘thing in itself’ makes no sense; and *not* because ‘we cannot know the things in themselves.’ This was Kant’s reason, but Kant, although admitting that the notion of a thing in itself *might* be ‘empty,’ still allowed it to possess a formal kind of sense. Internal realism says that we don’t know what we are talking about when we talk about ‘things in themselves.’ And that means that the dichotomy between ‘intrinsic’ properties and properties which are not intrinsic also collapses — collapses because the ‘intrinsic’ properties were supposed to be just the properties things have ‘in themselves.’ The thing in itself and the property the thing has ‘in itself’ belong to the same circle of ideas, and it is time to admit that what the circle encloses is worthless territory” (1987, 36). So, those who think that we can’t use “religion” because there is none such “in itself” are putting the cart before the horse. The “intrinsic nature” of socio-cultural constructs *can* be known.

metaphysical?<sup>17</sup> In this connection, the interesting aspects of predicates are “meta”-physical, because they are (or can be said to be) predicates about the ways things are: “Properties are ways things are, relations are ways things stand to each other.”<sup>18</sup> By “meta”-physical I do not suggest that universals are outside the naturalist cosmology of “space-time” — but that they include “more than meets the eye” in direct perception or in naïve empiricism. It is a widely accepted philosophical tenet that a concept cannot be an object — and vice versa. The concept of “culture,” for instance, is obviously not a thing, it is a metaphor, but that does not prevent it from being an object of thought or a subject in a sentence. The relations between concepts and objects are theory-dependent and the same goes for “universals.” An informed theory of universals thus also contains a critique of concept formation, generalization and comparison that is parallel to the critiques of empiricism, inductivism, and positivism in the philosophy of science: The furniture of the universe comes without its own labelling (strikingly many cosmogonic myths have humans name things — rather than having the gods do so); we do not know what they should be called “in themselves” but we do have good reasons to believe that they somehow exist and may become useful posits of human knowledge.

#### *Etic universals in comparative studies*

It is obvious that whichever way one imagines religion and the study of it, it will not be possible to do so without the activity of

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<sup>17</sup> For philosophers, “universals” are properties and relations. To linguists, however, “universals” appear as items of language similar to “things found.” Upon closer inspection, however, it turns out that linguists are also studying or discovering “things” which are interesting because they have certain properties, relations etc. and therefore qualify as subject matter for linguistics.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted from Armstrong’s discussion (1997, 30-31) of David Seargent’s suggestion to this effect. He notes that, “. . . talk of properties and relations as ‘ways’ does not derogate from their ontological reality. They are real features of things, real joints in reality, some of which are grasped in approximate fashion by everyday perception and others of which are uncovered *a posteriori* by deep scientific investigation” (30).

comparison, without the evaluations of resemblances and differences, without generalizations and “even” without universals. The study of anything seems to suggest that the more we know about the same things the more are we likely to be able to disagree about them.<sup>19</sup> In a clarifying perspective, one may compare the conditions of the study of “religion” with those of the studies of other human activities such as cultures, languages, economics and political systems — all in the plural and all somehow “just” generalized discursive formations — but no less real for that (as can be witnessed not least by those who have been the victims of the powers and practices of dominant discursive formations).

If it is true that religion is the creation of some bodies’ minds (e.g., the scholars’) so are all the other kinds of stuff which make up the objects of study of the other disciplines just mentioned. I consciously employ the term “discipline” here to refer to the seemingly almost counter-intuitive qualities of scholarly research: Scholars spend years teaching their students to understand, use, criticize and hopefully further develop the terminologies, classifications, concepts, models, theories etc. that are necessary to furnish a discipline with its identity as a field of enquiry. That is not only laudable but necessary, for the issues in any scholarly study are not self-evidently given: Pure and unadulterated inductivism *is* dead and gone as a heuristic strategy. There is nothing in the world of interest to the scholar of religion that is not in some way mediated by minds, categories, scholarship etc. — no facts without fiction. Since Kant we have been told that we know not what things are “in themselves,” thus, human universals concerning the knowledge about things are not in the things but in our classifications of them; they are in our categories and concepts, they are present *to us* only in our generalized terms and interpretations. But, of course, unless

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<sup>19</sup> Donald Davidson has a nice remark in this respect in his discussion of differences in conceptual schemes and in beliefs (philosophical about the world — not religious): “... we improve the clarity and bite of declarations of difference, whether of scheme or opinion, by enlarging the basis of shared (translatable) language or of shared opinion” (1984, 197).

we are hallucinating, there are reasons “out there” for us to have ideas about things.<sup>20</sup>

As a lesson from the study of religion it seems to be a common observation about human cognition that humans ordinarily operate on plural ontologies and metaphysics, including religious ones. Whether this descriptive fact may lead to more normative, ontological and epistemological considerations is not entirely clear to me. But it seems that the problem of where and how to “locate” universals *does* vary between levels of perceived reality and according to the kinds of particulars to which the universals seem to apply — for ontological, epistemological, theoretical, and methodological reasons. The problems that apply here concern the possibility that various metaphysics may be involved in various worlds: it could be suspected that the kinds of universals involved in understanding the physical world need not be the same as those involved in understanding the phenomena of mental or symbolic worlds. But, whichever properties they may have, the universals concerning socio-cultural products do remain within the limits of language — it is the only way in which we can describe, explain and understand them. All human knowledge comes in the form of cultural posits.

It may seem to be an extreme version of “a priori” conceptual realism to identify universals *semantically* with the meanings of general terms, but it probably is the best we can do — not least on such unwieldy notions as “religion.” There is no external “reality” which “in itself” determines the meaning of general terms; their “existence” depend on what humans call them and on the ideas they have about them.<sup>21</sup> We begin with the ideas available to us and then change them

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<sup>20</sup> About a century ago Durkheim and Mauss proclaimed that categorization had social origins. They thus added a third option to the two presented by empiricists and rationalists. Intuitively it seems reasonable to suspect that all options are valid in what concerns various entities and properties.

<sup>21</sup> This is where blatant relativism would seem to appear, but that is not really the case. See, e.g., Jensen (1997) on scientific theories as social facts. We may perceive of and call thing by different names (according to culture, history, interests etc.), but that diversity would rather add to the information available on any “phenomenon.” I could

along the way. “Religion” is not what it used to be, nor is the universe, and we also know now that what Marco Polo found in Indonesia was not the unicorn but the rhino. The human factor involved means that those involved can change things as long as they agree on the procedures. This lack of “reality”-reference would seem to threaten any reasonable communication, but it could turn out that it need not be a grave issue when we are dealing with the products of human social activity, such as all the “idealized” cognitive and socio-cultural models that make up our systems of orientation.

A certain amount of “idealism” is permitted when working on socio-cultural phenomena as there is human intentionality built into them. They are recognizable by humans — and probably just by humans, that is, as socio-cultural phenomena linked to social and cultural universals primarily expressed by symbolic means, e.g., in language.<sup>22</sup> Human cognition is about much more than detecting and cognizing the physical *Umwelt*; it concerns re-cognizing the emotions of self and others, motivations, social conventions, cultural ideals and all other “items” of interest to humans. Universals in and about the socio-cultural realms underpin human rationality — they become the standards by which we are able to establish meaningful communication and circumscribe the general conditions of rationality.

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imagine that “secularization” (one troublesome term) would become semantically enriched by being expressed in Maori as something like “whaka-noa” (the list of possible terms is endless).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Caws (1997, 17) on arguments for allowing “idealism” into the study of things social, and Searle (1995, 32-37) on “The Self-Referentiality of Many Social Concepts”: “Something can be a mountain even if no one believes it to be a mountain; something can be a molecule even if no one thinks anything at all about it. But for social facts, the attitude that we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon. If, for example, we give a big cocktail party, and invite everyone in Paris, and if things get out of hand, and it turns out that the casualty rate is greater than the battle of Austerlitz — all the same, it is not a war; it is just one amazing cocktail party. Part of being a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of being a war is being thought to be a war. This is a remarkable feature of social facts; it has no analogue among physical facts” (33-34).

*On the epistemology of socio-cultural products*

On the basis of these observations it appears easier epistemologically to handle a theory of universals — let us call them “social” here — concerning the subject matters of the human and social sciences than it is in the natural and physical sciences because there is no problem of “metaphysical realism” involved. This argument may sound odd at first because it is such a standard conviction that facts about the physical world are more readily available and empirically “solid.” According to widespread opinion (or our intuitive ontologies) they are just there and do not “talk back.” There is no interpretation and intentionality involved, all that which supposedly makes knowledge of human affairs such a fragile and clumsy undertaking. But why should such an empiricist dogma be true, could not the inverse apply? It is fair to say that we have no access to the universe “as such,” but as humans we may know socio-cultural products “in themselves” — one might even talk about the human spirit “recognizing” itself in socio-cultural products and in the many ways of being human.

Given the conditions of theory-dependence of facts, the conditions and limitations of human cognition and interpretation, we may access humanly constructed worlds. These are social facts and they are such only because there are universals involved — whether these come before, with or after “facts.” Concerning “social facts,” the questions of sequence or causality will probably have to be given up — not least because of the already noted tautology and circularity of social facts.

I cannot deny a suspicion that social universals are in or apply to all of what has just been mentioned: 1) some universals are transcendental preconditions (e.g. “structure”) before particular social facts or they could not exist; 2) some universals of social facts are in things “themselves” (e.g. counter-intuitive notions in religions) for them to be what they are; and 3) some are in the eyes of the beholder only (e.g. “marriage”) — through convention and “nothing more.” For religion all of this seems to apply: some properties and relations must apply, “be there,” or religions (and all that pertains to them) would not be

there at all as complex socio-cultural phenomena — and still there is ample room to call things by different names.

It should be possible to make a list of features, properties and relations that count as universal in religion and religions. If not so, the idea of a scholarly study of religion goes by the board. The possibility and validity of universals in religions and in the study of religions, as a range of “second-order” terms, conjointly amount to a kind of “transcendental precondition” for scholarly discourse: If no universals were present in what we study or *in* our study, we should not be able to construct much in the way of knowledge of all the many different things that humans know about — including the knowledge of things that do not exist. However, what that list of features etc. will look like, we do not quite know as yet, but it may turn out to look quite different from the many, more or less ethno-centric, “folk-models” currently in use.<sup>23</sup> Those preconditions should make it clear why there are reasons for entertaining the seemingly endless worries about “universals.” The easiest, most expedient, and most post-modern thing to do would be to forget all about universals and adopt a nominalist position: Things are only what they seem from a particular, and accidental or contingent perspective — nothing is universal, save, perhaps, the denial of universals. Post-modern nominalists can say that things look alike when they want them to, otherwise not; for visibility is not veracity, re-semblance is not being (however they determine the difference). Post-modernists can cut up the world in any way they wish and acknowledge that they do so only for their own local classificatory pleasure etc. That is a radical suggestion — but it is hardly a viable solution to the problem. Postmodernists do point to an important aspect, however: Most of the universals that we trade in,

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<sup>23</sup> An idea of how such a list can be formally composed can be gained from Boyer’s (2000) catalogue of possible combinations of categories and principles of religious concepts. The list is “rather short,” as he says, but it may be supplemented with similarly rigorous analytical tools from semiotics and cognitive semantics, e.g. on modalities and spatializations, so that more complex models become possible, say formal descriptions of “sacrifice,” “witchcraft,” or “magic.” Lawson and McCauley 1990 must be considered a landmark in this development.

and communicate through, are human contrivances and thus subject to the same conditions of historicity as are all other kinds of human knowledge.

Benson Saler's proposals based on a philosophy of "resemblances" implies more than a nominalist theory, because it comes with the universalizing "twist" that resemblances are "created" in human cognition on the basis of universal cognitive mechanisms.<sup>24</sup> There can be no doubt that for us to conceive of "cats" we need to be able to distinguish them from other animals and then apply general and predicating terms to these creatures. On this level of perception of items of the physical world, the issue of universals is intimately tied to those concerning prototypes, idealized cognitive models, frames etc. On other levels, "things" universal do become somewhat more abstract, for instance "immaculate conception," "justice," "virtue," "consciousness," or "understanding," although basic level models furnish the buildings blocks. Our social-cultural and symbolic cognition is to a large extent based on direct perception and on the properties of basic level cognitive processing "elevated" to a level of meta-representational and imaginative competence. But none of that would be possible were it not for isomorphic relations and transferability between the domains and levels. Universals may to a large extent relate to properties and functions of our cognitive systems, but they only work because there are things "out there" in the physical, mental, social and cultural realms that are prone to be universalized: Solid objects do have "solidness," cats do have "cathood" and persons "personness." Universals, ranging from simple cognitive schemas to complex symbolic definitions, are thus the *sine qua non* of the "entity" in question: were it not for that specific property or relation, if things were not in this or that "way," we would not conceive of this or that as belonging to a category. Would

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<sup>24</sup> Benson Saler's argument seems to be that it is possible to "naturalize" resemblance theory through an appeal to cognitive theorizing, i.e. by "reducing" a normative metaphysical problem ("what must constitute/count as resemblance"?) to a descriptive psychological investigation. If so, is this "naturalized epistemology" again — and with the same difficulties?

a religion without superhuman agents be a “religion” — as much of a construction the term and concept of religion happens to be? In the study of religions, the quarrels over definitions have been quite extensive. This is quite understandable when contemplating both the history and the subject matters of the field. Concepts and phenomena have frequently been confused, with the result that the use of general terms could be criticized for not being “precise enough” as terms for singular phenomena — on the general assumption that definitions must have the ability to be real and true.<sup>25</sup> Instead, definitions could rather be presented as shorthand theories which rely, again, upon complexes of concepts and assemblages of universals. This characteristic is more obvious when using the term “generalized interpretations,” for as in the case of “resemblance,” “generalized interpretation” indicates that some perform the generalizing interpretations and for good reasons (preferably), which means that the generalizations may even prove to be empirically tractable.

There is a middle ground between those who consider universals real and pre-existing, and “austere nominalists,” who say that particular things have nothing in common but our labelling. The middle position is “conceptualism”: the idea that we have universals in the form of concepts (as thoughts) with which we perform and grasp actions, events and things, and by the help of which we are able to classify by means of names and to compare things that may have something in common according to our concepts.<sup>26</sup> There may be good “real world” causes for calling something “food,” for perceiving what is there, according to schemas and rules, and thus turn it into a product

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<sup>25</sup> Here, I consciously avoid the complicated philosophical ontological problems concerning reference and the relations between words and objects, “concreta,” and “abstracta,” etc., and pragmatically presuppose the validity of a simplistic difference between concepts and phenomena along the “map is not territory” model. For an extensive introduction to the problem see, e.g., Loux 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Conceptualists think of universals as “thoughts” and nominalists think of universals as “names” — both are usable as general terms — terms being objects of language. Whatever “real” ontological universals may be, they are not terms in language, but something else.

of human knowledge in systems of classification. Although we may never know “how true” this view is, the pragmatic middle position is operable provided we know when and how to apply the concepts and what they mean in relation to the conventions informing them (i.e. their assertability conditions). In the sciences, frameworks of such conventions are now mostly termed “paradigms.” Although the issue of classification as a human activity is different from that concerning the status of universals, we can say that without concepts and universals, there would be no paradigms and no science at all.<sup>27</sup>

*Religions as “agencies”*

Similar conditions apply to religions (as congeries of social facts): they rely upon, reproduce and express conventions for the benefit of different forms of communication. Religions are, besides whatever else they may be, semantic networks and pre-eminently so in their pre-modern forms and functions.<sup>28</sup> Tribal religions — retaining that dubious designation for the present purpose — more clearly display some of the characteristics of what it means for human groups to share values, icons, orientations etc.: namely that “religion” contains what I would call “the elementary structures of meta-cognition.” Religions can be likened to computational or cybernetic schema-complexes that govern the socially available modes of communication. Religion, and culture, as “worlds” can be conceived as (also) transcending the individual subject’s cognition and as “agencies” which set rules for the ways in which individual and collective cognition are organized. If this is correct, it also supports the argument for “downward causation,” the idea that higher-order and more complex representations may regulate and govern the functions, mechanisms etc. of lower-level

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<sup>27</sup> In this connection, paradigms can be seen as clusters of general terms and the theories that warrant them — and their use in relation to the subject matter investigated. The theoretical object vs. subject matter is not an “all-or-nothing” dualism, we may suspect it to be one of degree along a continuum.

<sup>28</sup> I have attempted to present more detailed discussions concerning the semantic (Jensen 1999) and semiotic (Jensen 1993) aspects of religion.

entities and their properties.<sup>29</sup> It would be fair to assume that religions, in the form of discursive formations and programmes for narrative understanding and action, are responsible for much of what goes on among humans. Along this theoretical orientation it is not purely old-fashioned idealism to say that “religion governs life.” There are, of course, many other factors involved but religious worlds offer programs, scripts, and templates by which to act and enact.

The sharing of worlds, and the arguments as to which is the better one (should such a discussion arise), presupposes a general human rationality as well as the ability to share linguistic information and use universals as predicates: “Is it a bird, is it a . . . ?”<sup>30</sup> One of the ways in which religious systems enhance the possibility of communication is by fixing and sanctifying standards and referents and in that sense religious systems function as semantic factories providing a range of general terms and universals which inform its participants about “the ways things are.”

Then again, shareable language and communication presuppose, or imply, a more or less shared and correct view of the world and entails communicability because of all the universals in communication, language, and semantics, and this applies not only within, but also across cultures and across scholarly disciplines: Things are not as different as they may seem, and “divergent rationalities” are not as divergent as some would have it.<sup>31</sup> Linguistics has demonstrated

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<sup>29</sup> The problem of “downward causation” is the topic of a noteworthy anthology by Emmeche et al. (eds.) 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Recall, e.g., Ralph Bulmer’s classic study of “why the cassowary is not a bird” among the Karam of Papua (1967). Studies of classificatory systems are, seen in a different light, studies of 1) the relations between cognitive and semantic (cultural) domains; and of 2) indigenous constructions of explanatory systems that define the meanings and references of the theoretical terms of which these systems consist. See also more recent and relevant discussions on this matter in, e.g., Attran 1996. Human rationality is not, however, limited to the commerce in things, see, e.g., on rationality in religion and culture, Jensen and Martin 1997, and Apel 1979.

<sup>31</sup> It should be as rewarding as demanding to explore the relations between direct perception, conceptual structure and cultural competence, including scholarly ones.

that the languages of the world have a lot more in common than was previously supposed — and the question is whether such “deep similarities” relate primarily to cognition, or to what extent they depend upon a range of features of the language systems themselves.<sup>32</sup>

Many of the things learned about languages apply to the study of religion and other socio-cultural phenomena.<sup>33</sup> Thus, on “worlds” (religious or not): they may appear to be very different, but it also seems plausible that they are different on the basis of structurally similar cultural logics, rules, “schemas,” “scripts,” “framings,” etc.<sup>34</sup> As for their functions, religious universals can be likened to sets of meta-organizational schemata that semanticize such basic things as time, space, subjects, objects, modalities and dynamics of thought and action — in fact, anything that may be accommodated in humanly constructed “socio-cultural worlds.” Religious systems exhibit totalizing ambitions, it seems to be in their nature to “try to explain everything” in the processes of world-making. Making worlds is somehow parallel to building houses: the end products can be very diverse, but the methods involved in construction are similar — as are the materials. The logics of discursive socio-cultural systems are, at least in principle, as tractable, as evident, as the logic of cognitive systems and perhaps

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Rodney Needham has pointed out that “‘our analysis may be guided by the same logical constraints as must be effective in producing the systems that we study.’ . . . This is particularly clear in the comparative study of descent systems, terminologies, and certain rules of marriage, but there is a wider implication. If we consider that formal terms such as ‘symmetry’ or ‘transitivity’ are not peculiar to a particular linguistic and intellectual tradition, but denote properties which may be discriminable (either conceptually or in social practice) by any cultural system or thought, then it follows that the terms are intrinsically appropriate to the study of exotic collective representations. Alternatively, a more speculative notion is that the formal terms denote mental proclivities and constraints which are universal to mankind in the fabrication (deliberate or not) of categories and articulatory relationships” (1983, 64).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pinker 1994, 231-261.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Jensen 1999 on a semantic definition of religion.

<sup>34</sup> On these matters I owe much to Melford Spiro, e.g. 1984. On schemas, see especially D’Andrade 1995, ch. 6, and Quinn 1992 for such presumably universal phenomena as schemas for personhood, self-definition and social interpretation.

even more so.<sup>35</sup> This is not least because the workings of discursive systems are directly accessible whereas the properties and functions of cognitive systems only appear through advanced analyses and then, subsequently, need to be “formatted” in a discursive mode.<sup>36</sup> We do not yet know much about the ontological status and properties of discursive systems, but they must exist and function or we would not be able even to acknowledge our own ignorance.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, we seem to know much more about the world than we know about our knowledge of the world.

*Universals in the comparative study of religion*

Most of the “items” in the inventory of the study of religion, say sacrifice (or “puja”?), are concepts composed of abstract or general terms. Already it was noted that according to most philosophers general terms and concepts do not have direct reference to empirical matter (“maps do not smell of territory”). They are only meaningful in sets of relations of other terms, models, definitions, generalizations etc. in a more holistic system or paradigm. Some general terms come in graphic forms in models (e.g. of functions and structures), some come in narrative form in definitions, but in whatever form they come, they are aspect-specific concerning properties and relations — they cannot “cover it all.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> This has been amply pointed out by, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss, as well as by semioticians from V. Propp to A.J. Greimas and Y. Lotman.

<sup>36</sup> There is a trend in many cognitive analyses to plead ontological empiricist innocence by contending that the entities studied are “simply” there and directly observable, and by referring to things cognitive “as we all know” them (by way of intuitive analogy).

<sup>37</sup> On the limits of kinds of relativism and universal cognitive properties of humans, see the telling remarks in Kamppinen and Revonsuo (1993, 241).

<sup>38</sup> On the “Systematic Relationship Among Institutional Facts,” John Searle expresses this point succinctly: “An institutional fact cannot exist in isolation but only in a set of systematic relations to other facts. Thus, for example, in order that anybody in a society could have money, that society must have a system of exchanging goods and services for money. But in order that it can have a system of exchange, it must

From the world of religion, “funeral rite” could be an example.<sup>39</sup> Can they be found in all religions — can we say that they are really universal? It is a commonplace conviction that just one counter-instance would sweep away the assertion that they are. But it need not be so — for all that we need is to say is that *if* a given religion includes sets of actions to dispose of the dead, that is what we term “funeral rites” *when* these actions exhibit certain properties, have a noticeable kind of structure or function, are instantiations of a number of properties and relations pertaining to certain aspects of socio-cultural institutions and associated action- and belief-patterns. That is why we, tautologically, call those action complexes “funeral rites.” Therefore it does not make sense to ask whether funeral rites “really exist” or whether this ritual or that is “really” a funeral rite. As if the truth value of such an assertion could be measured against some uninterpreted and “objective” state of affairs! The abstract models, terms, and concepts that we apply to individual cases point to the properties those cases have, the “ways in which they are.” The more one knows about abstract models, terms, and concepts, the more cases they seem to apply to. That is — as a matter of fact — one of the basics of academic training. It is the analyst’s view, the etic activity of constructing theoretically informed knowledge about a certain subject matter, in this case all that pertains to the universal “religion.” One main intention of this contribution is to “demystify” universals in the study of religion, not least because of the troubled past of that notion. Universals are nothing to be afraid of, for although the history of universals in philosophy is long and complicated — and not yet resolved — there are good reasons for the study of religion to proceed because the role of universals in the study of human affairs can be

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have a system of property and property ownership. Similarly, in order that societies should have marriages, they must have some form of contractual relationships. But in order that they can have contractual relationships, they have to understand such things as promises and obligations” (1995, 35).

<sup>39</sup> Cf., e.g., Lévi-Strauss (1992, 35) and also Benson Saler’s paper in this issue of *Numen*.

seen as fairly unproblematic when conceived along the more pragmatic lines presented above.

Universals as general terms must be implied in any form of comparison. Comparison as an activity in the study of religion proceeds from generalization and not the other way around as inductivists and positivists have presumed. Generalizations are only possible when we have terms and concepts for common properties and relations that can be “instanced” in individual and particular cases. It is a matter of course that different properties and relations are relevant in various modes of comparison. I have attempted to narrow down the number of modes of comparison that may go into the study of religion (and similarly in other human and social sciences) and four main modes emerged. These modes involve universals in varying forms, as already noted, as it appears that not quite the same “kinds” of universals relate to entities with different ontologies, say, whether universals of function concerning mental properties are the same as universals of function concerning physical entities. But, leaving such intricacies aside, the following general conditions seem to apply to comparison and the roles played by universals:

1. A mode of comparison concerned with *form*: all entities of any kind, such as things material — individual bodies, objects from scriptures to stones, sweatlodges and cathedrals — and some things immaterial: number of gods etc. This “field” is analogous to grammar as concerning the paradigmatic inventory of items interchangeable.

2. A mode of comparison related to *function*: on the properties, rules, and relations among things and how one thing leads to another (“if so . . . then. . .”) — that is to say, in systems of human constructions, related to issues of causes, reasons, purposes, intentions. This field is analogous to and related to syntax as concerning rules and relations governing the possible and permissible arrangements of items in languages, actions and socio-cultural institutions.

3. A mode of comparison of *structure*: on the systems of relations and rules, on the architectures of worlds, cosmologies, patterns in

and of action complexes, and socio-cultural institutions.<sup>40</sup> All of this pertains to the construction of worlds and is intricately related to 1 and 2, as well as to:

4. A mode of comparison applied to *meaning* as “semantic content”: religious worlds are discursive formations articulating certain concerns about the interests of humans and their action. They tell different stories with different plots, but they are stories nevertheless. The knowledges in religious systems are propositional, and all ascriptions of meaning (to elephants etc.) come in narrative, metaphorical form. Socio-cultural systems organize action and knowledge in schemata (social-political-economical-practical; symbolic-discursive-linguistic-axiological; cognitive-psychological-epistemological) and we may typologize or classify religious systems and parts thereof on the basis of their semantic import. Just as we can compare all other kinds of stories, so can we legitimately compare all kinds of religious stories. People do it all the time and if we could not do so then we would not be who we are. And it is all thanks to “universals.”

#### *Concluding remarks*

Where does all this take us? Signs are democratic: they mean the same to all — but the circumstances and interpretations may certainly differ. We all know what a \$ “counts as,” but what it “means” to those who have none and to those that have too many — that certainly differs. The narratives of Darwinism, the Lord’s Prayer and the Communist Manifesto can be easily compared and understood — by all kinds of people. That is why some cherish them and others find them despicable. They mean what they mean — but what they mean to you and to me may be different — not because of a difference in contents, but in their imports and consequences. And that has mainly something to do with power rather than with semantics. It is because we *do* understand each other that critical voices can make a difference and an impact. Thus, any idea of privileging one voice, or standpoint, as unassailable and beyond criticism, is ultimately doomed as bad

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<sup>40</sup> The issue of “structure” has been further elaborated in Jensen 2000.

politics, bad ideology, bad, philosophy, bad scholarship — and even, perhaps, bad religion.

A *good* theory of universals also sets some standard of academic probity — it has an built-in normative bias towards reasonableness in communication. We are all human and have access to, and must submit to, the same cognitive and semantic standards.<sup>41</sup> If not, there is no possibility of any human science.

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<sup>41</sup> Donald Davidson's observations on the fundamental translatability of "conceptual schemes" come to mind here. He concludes by way of stating: "For we have found no intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different. It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind — all speakers of language, at least — share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we say that they are one" (1984, 198). In using the term "semantic standards" I therefore not suggest that we all share the same views and values, but yet, truth and lies, promises and denials are what they are in all languages, irrespective of semantic theory or "local knowledge" (i.e., whether one accepts a truth- or an assertability-conditional theory of word-meaning).

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# COMPARISON: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE INEVITABLE

BENSON SALER

## *Summary*

Schema theory and other facets of the cognitive sciences remind us that certain of the intellectual processes of the human brain are crucially comparative. In that comparison is ineluctable in monitoring the world and in coming to understand newly encountered events, then perhaps we can consciously improve on what is cognitively inevitable. It is suggested here that if we deliberately move from what the philosopher H.H. Price calls “the Philosophy of Universals” to what he terms “the Philosophy of Resemblances,” our comparisons are likely to become more realistic, both existentially and cognitively. Further, in applying the Philosophy of Resemblances in both cross-cultural and cross-species comparisons, we may better tame the ethnocentric language of the former and the anthropocentric language of the latter in their respective efforts to transcend conceptualized boundaries in order to make comparisons.

## I

In an essay published in 1863, the poet Charles Baudelaire identified “modernity” in art with the transient, the fleeting, and the contingent, in contrastive tension with the eternal and the immutable. Relative to that tension, later essayists emphasized a tension between the particular and the general as another of the discernible hallmarks of modernity or modernism, those terms now being variously applied to more than we conventionally associate with art.

Postmodernism, in comparison, would reduce tension by celebrating and otherwise privileging the particular. In celebrating the particular, it also accepts, as David Harvey (1989:44) puts it, “the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic that formed the one half of Baudelaire’s conception of modernity.” Hence the postmodernist’s avowed rejection (if not always a rejection in other respects) of

“meta-narratives” and “totalizing” theories. But in endorsing only one-half of what produces the distinctive tension of modernity/modernism, and in recommending that we eschew the general, some postmodernists urge us to do what we cannot. For the general is intimately associated with the comparative, and the comparative cannot be eschewed.

Comparison is vital in certain of the activities of the mind-brain. We regularly monitor the world, and in doing so we creatively and selectively compare newly encountered phenomena to established representational structures. Comparative processes are thus of crucial importance in cognition.

The representational structures to which I refer are sometimes called “schemas.” They are, in George Mandler’s words, “abstract representations of environmental regularities,” and our comprehension of newly encountered events is often triggered by the more-or-less matching schemas that they activate (Mandler 1984:56). Schemas are thus processors as well as representations. As Roy D’Andrade puts it, from a certain perspective they “are a kind of mental recognition ‘device’ which *creates* a complex interpretation from minimal inputs,” and as such they are more than just “pictures” in the mind (D’Andrade 1995:136). This is also the case for what cognitive scientists mean by “prototypes.” Prototypes can be thought of as highly typical instantiations of schemas. As such, they consist of relatively specified expectations, in comparison to the more “schematic” or open-slotted constitution of schemas in general (for an application of prototype theory to religion, see Saler 1993, 2000). To quote D’Andrade once more: “The filling in of the slots of a schema with an individual’s standard default values creates a *prototype*” (1995:124).

While schema theory has undergone important developments in the last several decades, and has become increasingly assimilated to models of parallel distributed processing or “connectionist” networks (Norman 1986, D’Andrade 1995:138-143), it has always supported the understanding that certain of the most important activities of the mind-brain are crucially comparative. It helps us to appreciate more profoundly than we otherwise might that our scholarly efforts at study-

ing some denominated or otherwise identified religious complex are in significant ways motivated, figured, and constrained by our understandings (and misunderstandings) of other religious complexes and their larger cultural and situational contexts. What we are sometimes pleased to call our discoveries or fresh understandings ineluctably occur within comparative frameworks, regardless of whether or not we explicitly acknowledge that that is so. Inasmuch as comparison is inescapable in our intellectual engagements, then perhaps raising and attempting to answer significant questions about it could help us to improve the inevitable.

In the remainder of this paper I touch on two sets of topics respecting comparative structures and processes that I deem especially interesting to students of the human condition. First, I discuss the matter of generalizations as expressed in efforts to posit so-called “cultural universals” or “human universals.” Second, I suggest that juxtaposing cross-cultural comparativists to phylogenetic comparativists helps illumine certain problems of language that bedevil efforts at explicit comparisons.

## II

Landmarks within cultural anthropology in the specification of cultural or human universals include Clark Wissler’s discussion of “The Universal Pattern” in a 1923 book, George Peter Murdock’s 1945 essay “The Common Denominator of Cultures,” Clyde Kluckhohn’s 1953 paper “Universal Categories of Culture,” and Donald E. Brown’s 1991 book, *Human Universals*. Each, I think, broaches some interesting considerations.

Thus, for example, Murdock identifies cultural universals with commonalities in form rather than in content. He opines, for instance, that while funeral rites throughout the world vary greatly in content, they can be viewed as formally similar in terms of analytical sub-universals, such as institutionalized means of disposing of corpses, expressing grief and solacing mourners, and addressing potential rends in the fabric of social relations occasioned by the demise of social actors. And Donald Brown, who agreeably (for me at least) relates his

discussion to developments in evolutionary psychology, offers some sophisticated caveats, insights, and perspectives. Thus, for example, he appreciates the fact that the positing of human universals typically rests on limited cases (1991:51). That is, the supposition that certain things are universal in human life is not supported by exhaustive studies of all humankind but only by the cases actually known and reasonable inferences or hypotheses related to those cases. Further, seemingly negative cases, if such are encountered, are to be discounted if good reasons can be adduced for doing so.

Now, despite Brown's sophistication and general good sense, I am uncomfortable with the notion of human universals. I will now briefly sketch some reasons for my discomfort, as preparation for proposing that instead of talking about human universals we speak about natural resemblances, and that instead of attempting to identify cultural universals we look for cultural resemblances.

To begin, discussions such as Brown's should be related to what others have proposed. Putting aside for the moment arguments among philosophers regarding what they call "the problem of universals," arguments that Brown and his predecessors largely ignore, we find an almost bewildering variety of stipulated sorts of "universals" to consider. Brown lists, and to varying extents describes, the following: substantive universals, formal universals, near universals, absolute universals, statistical universals, implicational or conditional universals, unrestricted or non-conditional universals, innate universals, manifest universals, experiential universals, universals of content, universals of classification, another (albeit unlabeled) conception of universals embodied in universal models or universal frameworks, emic universals, etic universals, universals stated in the negative (for example, "no society is a matriarchy"), and then some as yet unused or underused universals that Brown deems potentially useful, namely universals of essence and universals of accident and new universals and former universals (Brown 1991:39-53).

These universals are not arranged into any sort of discernible, overall classificatory scheme, nor are they all of comparable type. Some of them, moreover, may be combined with others, as, for

example, in the case of implicational and statistical universals. In any case, this profusion — and, I fear, confusion — of universals is enough to cross a medieval schoolman's eyes.

While Donald Brown serves as our initial guide for defining or characterizing the listed kinds of universals, there is another question about definition or characterization that is more troublesome and not as well handled. That is, how are we to recognize or justify possible examples of various posited universals? Or, to rephrase it with greater substantive focus, how are we to recognize or justify purported examples of human or cultural universals? If, for instance, we suppose that funeral rites are a cultural universal, how are we to identify funeral rites not only within some culturally-organized population but also among different culturally-organized populations?

This question touches on what philosophers call "the problem of universals," although social scientists, insofar as I am aware, generally pay little attention to the literature in philosophy addressed to that topic. A weak excuse for neglecting it could rest on the fact that what philosophers traditionally mean by the term "universal" is not the same thing as what social scientists usually mean by "universal" when they posit cultural or human universals. But while there is a genuine difference, the philosophical problem relates significantly to invocations of the term "universal" in the social sciences.

"The problem of universals" in philosophy is actually a congeries of problems. There is, however, a central motivating concern that is captured in this question: *How do we justify applying the same general term to a diversity of particulars?* Classical attempts to answer that question include the Platonic *universalia ante rem*, the Aristotelian *universalia in rebus*, and various permutations or refinements of these. In the twentieth century, however, a new set of answers has been proposed, a set of answers subsumable under the rubric of "resemblance theory," and I recommend that we embrace resemblance theory in our efforts to make and sustain explicit comparisons and generalizations.

In resemblance theory, objects are apperceived as resembling one another in different respects and in different degrees (Price 1971:45). As the philosopher A.D. Woozley puts it,

Red objects are to be called red simply because they resemble each other in a way in which they do not resemble blue objects or hard objects. . . . There is a similarity between the red of one and the red of the other, and the similarity might be anything from being virtually exact . . . to being only approximate and generic. (1967:204)

The philosopher H.H. Price distinguishes between what he calls the Philosophy of Universals and the Philosophy of Resemblances. Proponents of both philosophies generally agree that there can be a class of red objects. But, Price writes,

The question is, what sort of a structure does a class have? That is where the two philosophies differ. According to the Philosophy of Universals, a class is so to speak a promiscuous or equalitarian assemblage. All its members have, as it were, the same status in it. All of them are instances of the same universal. . . . But in the Philosophy of Resemblances a class has a more complex structure than this. . . . Every class has, as it were, a nucleus, an inner ring of key members, consisting of a small group of standard objects or exemplars . . . [and] every other member of the class should resemble the class exemplars as closely as they resemble one another. (1971:46-47)

My suggestion for improving the comparative enterprise is that we refrain from positing universals in favor of rendering explicit judgments about resemblances. Instead, that is, of asking, "What might be human universals?," it would be better to ask, "What might be significant natural resemblances among humans?" (e.g., Needham 1972). My reasons for making this suggestion include the conviction that the Philosophy of Resemblances receives greater support from the theorizing and findings of contemporary cognitive science than does the Philosophy of Universals. That is so not only with respect to increasing recognition of the widespread distribution of "prototype effects" (popular judgments that some instantiations of natural language categories are better exemplars of their categories than others; see, for example, Lakoff 1987), but in much else as well, including connectionist theory, which imputes to cognizing subjects connection networks and weightings while not necessarily imputing rules (D'Andrade 1995:143-146). Further, while the term "universal" may connote something "out there" that is independent of cognitive mediation, "resemblance" suggests a

judgment that *someone* makes, and makes within a mediating framework (Saler 1993, 2000).

### III

Finally, by way of concluding, I touch very briefly on another problem that has been viewed as bedeviling cross-cultural comparisons: the problem of *ethnocentric* language. That problem, interestingly enough, is paralleled by a problem faced by phylogenetic comparativists, the problem of *anthropocentric* language. Both are problems in finding appropriate language to be used across conceptualized boundaries, in one case cultural boundaries, in the other case species boundaries. As it happens, however, the boundaries of the former are often shifted in keeping with the methodology of the latter, thus reminding us of the strategic and tactical flexibility that we actually enjoy in pursuing our intellectual interests.

In phylogenetic perspective, *inter*-cultural differences among human beings are to all intents and purposes collapsed into *intra*-cultural differences. That is, in comparing human beings to other animals, differences between cultures of the sort that otherwise interest anthropologists are effectively ignored or treated as if they were merely varied expressions of human universals. By so doing we envision a human situation that admits to some extent of internal cultural heterogeneity but that is otherwise treated as if it were phenomenally homogeneous for purposes of phylogenetic comparisons. The desire of the cross-cultural comparativist to identify pan-human regularities or recurrences is thus realized to a certain extent in the comparative operations of his colleague or other self, the phylogenetic comparativist.

Despite, however, such strategic and tactical maneuvers in serving the purposes of phylogenetic comparativists, the problem of finding appropriate language has not really been solved when we look at cross-cultural comparisons through a closer lens. It is here, I think, that the Philosophy of Resemblances offers us advantages in achieving comparisons. It inspires us to select and order apperceived resemblances in things that we explicitly recognize to differ rather than translate similarities into identities and so eclipse differences. Under its aegis,

and with heightened sensitivity to the powerful roles of analogy in human cognizing, our comparisons will change in the direction of greater complexity and subtlety. They will take greater account of variations and differential weightings of elements and their associations than is mandated by the traditional Philosophy of Universals and the perspectives on categories and comparisons that it supports. In short, our comparisons are likely to become more realistic, both existentially and cognitively.

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# UNIVERSALS REVISITED: HUMAN BEHAVIORS AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS

WILLIAM E. PADEN

## *Summary*

This paper explores one way of addressing current skepticism about cross-cultural comparisons. The typical challenge to comparativism is that it either imposes or suppresses cultural meanings; religion, as a form of culture, is contextual and hence intrinsically incomparable. In contrast, I advance a model that identifies panhuman forms of behavior shared by any culture. Differences in historical religious life, in turn, can be described as cultural versions and transformations of those default behaviors. Comparativism then finds a broader, species-level basis for both commonality and significant variation. The paper explores various theoretic underpinnings and implications of this approach.

Cross-cultural comparativism has faced two prominent criticisms. One is that its categories are impositions — often of a religiously or Eurocentrically imperialistic kind — that distort or obliterate contextual significations. The other quite different concern is that any valid generalization about cultural commonalities — for example, that all societies have decorative arts or make shelters — is bound to be so abstract as to be obvious or vacuous.

Still, the questions do not go away: How to conceive of what recurs in human life, or in religious life? How can “difference” be found unless it is difference with regard to something that is otherwise similar or shared? How to find secular, post-theological bases for comparative perspective in the wake of a poststructuralist infatuation with diversity and conceptual reflexivity?

The purpose of this study is to investigate one approach, among many possible avenues, to a response. I will build upon the primary idea that we have regarded the comparativism problem too much from the point of view of cultural categories, and that we will do well to

reconsider the uses of a broadened notion of human behaviors underlying and shared by all cultures. As non-obvious as that might be to postmodernists who question the notion that one can speak of shared human attributes, it will be obvious to natural scientists, for whom humans appear as a singular phylogenetic kind, with common genetic programming, social predispositions, and infrastructural cultural behaviors. The anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn had summed up a view of comparativism in 1953 that has the merit of making the distinction between the human and the cultural clear:

Valid cross-cultural comparison could best proceed from the invariant points of reference supplied by the biological, psychological and sociosituational "givens" of human life. These and their interrelations determine the likenesses in the broad categories and general assumptions that pervade all cultures because the "givens" provide foci around which and within which the patterns of every culture crystallize.<sup>1</sup>

While I will substitute infrastructural "behaviors" for Kluckhohn's language of givens and invariants, the primary distinction of human/cultural will be the same.

Classical phenomenological comparativism, for its part, has bequeathed an enormous body of thematics, but a thematics tied to cultural categories, meanings and institutions. The points of comparability are religious topics — that is, classifications of kinds of religious belief and behavior. Not surprisingly, the patterns — like "deity" or "savior" — then become problematic when used as points of cross-cultural reference. They remain on the surface of culture, bound to their own folk origins and prototypes, and typically unconnected and unengaged with knowledges of the common human worlds described by the human sciences. They remain suspended in their own lexical, taxonomic mid-air, as expressions of the religious life. They fail to make the transition from being universal categories *for* the comparison of religions

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn, "Universal Categories of Culture," in A.L. Kroeber *et al.*, *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 521.

as an organizational project carried out by Westerners, to being universal categories of religious behavior.

By contrast, another way of finding points of comparability and recurrence other than through encyclopedic or morphological religious taxa is to shift focus from the topicalities of inter-cultural religious forms to the realm of panhuman behaviors — behaviors to which cultures add their differences of content. This approach involves identifying continuities in the kinds of things people do as humans — rather than patterns in the beliefs or “meanings” they project as religious insiders. Behind all cultures and their products are genetically endowed human actors enacting and negotiating social universes, and constructing worlds in patterned ways.

#### *Universal Behaviors*

Part of the problem of the concept of universality is that it is perceived either to hinge either on ontological, foundationalist assumptions, or on obvious biological functions, or on basic lists of cultural institutions identified by anthropologists — like incest avoidance, courtship practices, or rites of passage. Although the anthropological project went out of style in the age of interpretive anthropology,<sup>2</sup> Donald E. Brown’s book, *Human Universals* (1991) effectively reopened the issue.<sup>3</sup> Religion scholars, too, have begun to reconsider ways of addressing the notion of recurrence, that is, common species-level ways that human minds, actors or societies engage the world. One direction is found in cognitive studies,<sup>4</sup> another is represented in Walter Burkert’s work correlating religious behaviors with biological and evolu-

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<sup>2</sup> A representative post-classical review of the concept of comparison in anthropology is Ladislav Holy, ed., *Comparative Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991). Brown reviews the history of anthropological theories of universals, and provides an extensive and useful annotated bibliography. However, he offers only a few narrow observations about how the question of human universals relates to comparative religion.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and E. Thomas Lawson

tionary factors,<sup>5</sup> or in Luther H. Martin's paper, in this issue of *Numen*, on the universality of the category of kinship and its patterns.

While there are many ways to find patterns that underlie culture, here I focus on the broad idea that common to all sociocultural life is a wide network of universal kinds of behaviors and behavioral dispositions upon which or from which religious life builds its activities and worlds. Note that the word "universal" here is an adjective rather than a noun or "thing." In fact, the adverbial form would be even better, in the sense: "Behaviors general to the human species may be said to be found universally." I therefore link the notions of generality and universality, implying that the formation of general concepts about universally recurring behaviors is both a human construction and also a construction *about* something that exists in some aspect.

The examples on the following list — although they are but a small selection — are particularly basic and salient for the study of religion. Indeed, they are informed by and are in some ways derived *from* the comparative study of religion. Hence, behavioral scientists and historians of religion alike should have something to say about them. I group them in terms of different behavioral modes or domains, and characterize them all — and this is important — in their verbal, gerundial form.<sup>6</sup>

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and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Walter Burkert, *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Years ago, the anthropologist Anthony Wallace had also proposed that religion be understood in terms of verbs rather than nouns, behaviors instead of institutions, and came up with his own list of nuclear actions that he thought "alone or in combination" accounted for religious life. They were: addressing the supernatural, performing music (including dancing and singing), the physical manipulation of psychological states, exhortation, reciting mythic and moral codes, imitating or simulating, touching (mana-objects), not touching (taboos), eating and drinking, offering/sacrificing, congregating, becoming inspired, and the placing of symbolic objects. A very "rough and ready list," as Wallace said, but on the right track. Cf. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966), 52-67. Recent work by Malory Nye also advocates approaching "religion" as a form of activity, paralleling the position I take in this

### Universal Behaviors

#### SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

Forming bonds and loyalties with a kinship group  
 Distinguishing between kin and non-kin  
 Ranking people within a group  
 Learning reciprocities and etiquettes of cooperative relationships (or social give and take exchange)  
 Making and following rules  
 Defending/protecting group order  
 Punishing or resolving infractions of order  
 Socializing and initiating the young  
 Recognizing authority and social power  
 Communicating with others; asking, petitioning

#### SOCIOCULTURAL BEHAVIORS

Passing on cultural prototypes for imitation as guidelines for behavior  
 Endowing certain objects and persons with superhuman status, prestige, authority, inviolability, charisma  
 Constructing pasts and reciting sacred histories  
 Regenerating social values by performing periodic rites and festivals  
 Marking and dignifying important occasions and roles with ritual behavior and special objects

#### CONCEPTUAL BEHAVIORS

Creating linguistic objects that have no visible existence, and acting toward them as though they were real and efficacious  
 Classifying and mapping the universe, including time and space.  
 Worldmaking  
 Attributing significance (including causation) to events and objects, whether mental or physical

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paper. See his "Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religionizing: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 12: 447-476.

## SELF-MODIFICATION BEHAVIORS

Experimenting with alternative forms of consciousness, trance, dissociation

Disciplining the mind and body and forming constraining regimens of behavior in order to effect certain results and kinds of fitness; using ideas to guide behavior and sort out behavioral options

Reflecting on perceived errors of thought and behavior

Reinventing selfhood

Such behavioral genera are endless. The list invites any number of etic formulations, simple or complex. Its items are only suggestive of a behavioral phonetics that can be expanded and given analytic complexity,<sup>7</sup> and — here is the comparativist issue — they form points of cross-cultural comparison that are neither vacuous, because of their rich and various historical applications and contents, nor intrusive, because of their transcultural nature. The *ways* religious cultures “do” these behaviors direct attention to difference; *that* they all do them forms a point of comparability and invites theoretic interest.

Any one (or more) of these behaviors is “religious” — using the term here simply as a nonessentialist semantic indicator — insofar as it involves sacred, culturally postulated notions of the superhuman.

I offer now a series of points about the uses and implications of this approach.

1) Such categories constitute part of a “grammar of behavior,” a “behavioral repertoire,” or what some have called a kind of human

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<sup>7</sup> For example, one could utilize single-term concepts (denoting behaviors), like “learning,” “building,” or “performing;” or theoretically impacted concepts like “maximizing fitness;” or combinatory concepts, as Jonathan Z. Smith does in analyzing examples of the way cultures are constituted by the double process of “both making differences and relativizing those very same distinctions.” For his interesting account of this concept, which in my terminology refers to a kind of behavior, see J.Z. Smith, *Differential Equations: On Constructing the “Other,”* Thirteenth Annual University Lecture in Religion (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1992), 11.

“ethosystem.”<sup>8</sup> They are surely some of the elementary forms of human continuity between cultures. Cultural activity, including religious activity, plays out and creatively improvises on their possibilities, exactly as actual language plays out the possibilities of an unconscious grammar.

2) The examples on the above list suggest that we should get past the demeaning semantic associations that “behavior” is just something having to do with rats or adolescents, or that it is just tantamount to a series of discrete acts like shouting or lifting. To speak about behavior is not to somehow reduce the extraordinary process we call civilization to something merely pre-rational or animalistic, for culture is not just the result of behavior, it *is* behavior, and it includes everything that scientists, artists, politicians, comedians and shamans do, just as it includes all the subtleties of human communicative relationships. All civilization, in an enhanced behavioral model, is theatre.

3) Note that “meaning” (along with language) can and should be understood here as a behavior. Meaning is something the brain is always doing, always making, just as thinking, imagining, and speaking have a performatory character. In fact, one of the contributions of postmodern scholarship has been to draw attention to the way thought, discourse and myth constitute forms of social practice.

4) The behaviors listed above obviously have a high level of generality, referring not to discrete actions or cultural institutions but to generic functions and processes. They are etic reductions that identify an aspect of behavior occurring in common among otherwise separate sociocultural settings — an aspect of behavior referring to purpose or

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<sup>8</sup> To use the terminology of Robin Fox, in *The Search for Society: Quest for a Biosocial Science and Morality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 20ff, 116ff; and Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 1-23. A particularly impressive attempt to link the study of religious culture and cultural universals with the study of underlying “behavioral predispositions” is Joseph Lopreato, *Human Nature and Biocultural Evolution* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

function.<sup>9</sup> For example, as Robin Fox notes, bonding processes are universal but the nuclear family per se is not.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, deferential behavior is universal, but may be instantiated by any number of culturally specific acts like bowing, lowering one's eyes, or speaking in a certain tone. All societies form worldviews, yet no two ontologies are the same. All societies are inventive but not all invented the wheel or the microchip. Comparability, then, is with reference to functional analogies between otherwise different cultural activities.

5) While the behaviors on the list are reductions, they do not as such cancel out what their cultural versions mean to participants, any more than the reduction "water" or H<sub>2</sub>O cancels out the significance of swimming or boating to the swimmer or boater. The reductions are neutral with regard to varying cultural and individual meanings. Religious or cultural associations to the insider are thus acknowledged as irreducible and to that extent conserved.<sup>11</sup>

6) Concepts about universal behaviors are themselves empty of meaning (like the word "water") unless they are connected to other outside networks of theoretic significance. The behaviors on the list bear not only on religious histories but to rich bodies of socio-scientific theory. Thus, the behavior, "passing on cultural prototypes for imitation, as guidelines for behavior," affords a linkage with studies of the importance of imitation and cultural transmission. Or the study of renewal-rites behaviors may bear on theories of the role of emotional loadings in the long-term memory process. Kin sociality and nonkin reciprocity behaviors obviously relate to and are illumined by strong research traditions in both biology and bioanthropology. The very

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<sup>9</sup> My approach here, with regard to etic, functionalist universals, is similar to that of Ward H. Goodenough, *Description and Comparison in Cultural Anthropology* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Robin Fox, *The Red Lamp of Incest* (New York: Dutton, 1980), 7.

<sup>11</sup> The investigation of *how* worlds signify to insiders is always part of the ethnographic, historical and case-specific study of religious expressions. It is also an area where certain types of phenomenological analysis apply.

distinction of many domains and logics of behavior connects with modularity theory. And so forth.

7) Religious practices — that is, those that are believed to have sacred, superhuman reference — give extraordinary historical instantiation and development to each of the universal behaviors on the above list, not to mention myriad others, often showing some of their more extreme, inventive possibilities. Indeed, the cross-cultural study of religious life has been a particularly rich source for exposing and illustrating recurrent functions and processes like these, functions that a chemist, say, might not naturally come up with as salient categories of “world” description. In that sense, comparative religion scholars should have special insight into the functioning and history of these behaviors — and the kinds of religious “ingenuity” with which they are often configured.<sup>12</sup> Religious meaning-making is an outstanding application of how the mind organizes the environment into patterns; religious worldmaking shows egregious examples of how humans form universes of salient memories, time and space; religious honor and loyalty might make clearer the nature of honor and loyalty as human dispositions.

At the same time that religion can be linked with different genres of elementary behaviors, religious systems are formed from combinations of those behaviors. Indeed, one of the behaviors is world-building itself. Hence, while I think that the universal behaviors on the previous list explain religion more fully and generically than do organizing schemas like “beliefs about transcendence, human nature, and salvation,” or even “myth and ritual,” it remains that the notion of behavioral ingredients does not take away from the fact that religious cultures, like all forms of culture (e.g. warfare, sports, technology), establish and express their own kinds of environments with their own distinctive reference points. Hence I cannot agree that the concept of plural behavioral domains makes the concept of religion or “religious worlds”

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<sup>12</sup> One thinks here of Jonathan Z. Smith’s work on the concept of ingenuity or “cuisine” in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36-52.

redundant.<sup>13</sup> But the plurality certainly does challenge hegemonizing notions that there is something called “religion” that is to be explained by the constraints of a single domain.<sup>14</sup>

### *Conceiving Comparativism*

If one’s only purpose were to identify or collect general types and topics, these etc, abstracted versions of human behavior may appear to be trivial or merely classificatory. But as indicated above, the common functions in fact contain endless transformations and varieties of cultural, historical and environmental contents relative to their default possibilities. Identifying comparable forms of behavior is then a pivot point for finding and examining the differential variations, contrasts, and cultural workings and reworkings of those common behaviors. In other words comparative religion focuses on *how* religious cultures construct pasts, defend identities, negotiate reciprocities, distinguish kin and nonkin, endow objects with prestige, mark significant times, discipline the mind, experiment with consciousness, engage linguistic objects as though they were entities, and map their universes. As with the case of language, “behavior” obviously has an illimitable and richly interesting history, developed from common, often unassuming grammatical possibilities and types.

Thus, comparative perspective here moves back and forth between the continuity of common functions and the contrastable differentials of historical specificity and context.<sup>15</sup> The cultural versions are not

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<sup>13</sup> As Timothy Fitzgerald affirms, in his *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> I elaborate on these points in my “Religion, World, Plurality,” in Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian C. Wilson (eds.), *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations*, Studies in the History of Religions Vol. LXXXI (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 91-106.

<sup>15</sup> I have tried to describe some of this in my *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), and also in “Elements of a New Comparativism,” in Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 182-192.

just copies or replicas of a given meaning, as is often the case in the old comparativism where historical examples only show tautologically what we already knew from the archetype. Eliadean versions of sacred space, for example, are typically illustrative of commonality and sameness of motif. By contrast, a reformed comparativism does not limit the variations on the theme to just representing expressions of the theme but also studies them to learn from their sociocultural, contextual differences. Why, for example, do Quaker meetinghouses, Hopi kivas, and Gothic cathedrals use space *differently*? As William James observed, classification (here, “making sacred space”) does not necessarily explain away particulars but allows careful comparison of their distinctive characteristics.<sup>16</sup>

The process of comparing versions of a single theme relates to Benson Saler’s description of the role of prototypes and the concept of resemblance, which he contrasts with the concept of universals.<sup>17</sup> In the prototype model, as I understand it, the kinds of behaviors on my list would each imply default cultural examples that best characterize the concept, and those examples would become the standards in relation to which versions of that theme become either better or worse instances. I agree that ferreting those out in any conceptual schema would certainly be a productive exercise. For example, behind the concept, “forming cooperative bonds and loyalties with a kinship group” one might be thinking of the model of the Mosaic covenant, or the Buddhist *samgha*, or the Mafia, or the biology of a beehive. At the same time, the question of prototypal precedence is partly a chicken-and-egg issue: Is the concept (kin loyalty) formed inductively by regarding broad sets of examples like these or is one of the examples in fact the prototype that determines the selective range of the others?

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<sup>16</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Benson Saler, “Comparison: Some Suggestions for Improving the Inevitable,” in this volume.

It is perhaps sufficient to be alert to both sides of the matter, depending on the genre, circumstances and utility of the concept itself.<sup>18</sup>

To refer to universal behaviors is therefore not necessarily to override particularity. While an anthropologist might contend, for example, that the western word “eating” obscures the interesting distinctions that Balinese culture makes with its many different terms for “eating” in different kinds of social and physical contexts,<sup>19</sup> it seems to me that one could also say that such diversity was itself discoverable partly by the very capacious genericism of the term. Analogous with eating, all societies make pasts, but do so with different contents and styles; boundary making is common but everywhere charged with complex, particular cultural values involving nuanced negotiations of status and honor; all peoples mark time with periodic festivals but the festivals encode cultural values of every conceivable sort.

If the study of “world religions” separated religious material into systems defined by different sets of beliefs, and if Eliadean-style typologies elaborated patterns of symbolic meanings, a more anthropologically inclined comparativism might differentiate religious data according to behavioral types, sets, and subsets. Identifying these domains and diverse functions also allows us then to more effectively get behind the clumsy, entified term “religion” in order to see what is taking place on the ground, and in turn, the study of such ground patterns may effect theoretic consilience with the wider work of the

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<sup>18</sup> I would think that “resemblance” could be understood *either* in relation to standard prototypes *or* to conceptual characterizations (like those on my list above, which have a certain plasticity). In neither case are “recurrences” matters of exclusive or homogeneous class membership. Universal behaviors are not essences but conceptual constructs about kinds of activities that allow endless cultural versions of themselves and allow for marginal cases. There are different ways of “forming cooperative bonds.” Prof. Saler and I have had an exchange on the matter of transcultural vs. prototypal concepts in “Review Symposium: Benson Saler’s *Conceptualizing Religion*,” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 12-1/2 (2000), 307-313, and 328-332.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Hobart, “Summer’s Days and Salad Days: The Coming of Age of Anthropology?,” in Ladislav Holy (ed.), *Comparative Anthropology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 39.

social sciences.<sup>20</sup> There is then both a theoretic program “upward” toward explaining the contextual variables of cultural difference, and “downward” toward the realm of broader, connective, infrastructural generalizations and explanations about human behavior.

I recommend, then, that we not limit comparative religion to illustrating religious categories and inventories, though this has its uses, but rather that we enlarge the concept of a “pattern” to include any number of thematizations of any degree of complexity — the better to describe the complexity and contextuality of religious subject matter and to avoid the tendency to monolithic conceptual packagings and single-concept foundationalisms. “Knowledge” will be a function of such thematizations and their controlled formations by and applications to empirical, historical variants.

As I mentioned at the beginning, this model only describes one angle on comparison, albeit one that directly addresses key criticisms. Comparison per se is of course a tool of any conceptual endeavor, and is not necessarily linked with the enterprise of identifying universal recurrences. For example, by a kind of inversion of the universalizing model, comparative analysis is also possible starting with particulars. That is, one could begin with what appears to be a set of common actions and then show ways that those actions (or symbols, etc.) take on different purposes and meanings in different cultures. Thus, one could set up comparison in either direction: similar function, different acts; *or* similar acts, different functions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I refer of course to E.O. Wilson’s term, from his *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Benson Saler made an apt response to Walter Burkert’s proposed analogy between human and animal “escape” behaviors. Burkert had compared sacrificial mutilations such as finger sacrifice with behaviors like those of a trapped fox that gnaws off its paw to escape, or a lizard that detaches its tail in the mouth of a pursuer. But Saler observed that the act of cutting off a finger can also have different meanings according to cultural contexts: for example, in some societies it constitutes an institutionalized way of expressing grief at the death of a close relative; for others, amputation of a finger is a token of fealty to a leader. Neither of these could

To the contemporary concern that behaviors *cannot* be abstracted from cultural meanings and that all behavior is necessarily embedded or invested with cultural purpose, I have offered a distinction between generic, human behavioral functions and specific cultural actions. To be sure, these functions are etically conceived by someone other than the actor, but comparability — indeed, what we call analytical knowledge — requires such a level of abstraction and degree of removal. Generic behavior is what the scientist sees because he sees many versions of culture side by side. We should make no apologies for this. At the same time, the scholar's responsibility for the aptness or inaptness of his historical exemplifications remains.

I do realize the complexity of what I am proposing and that both the question of human universals and the project to overcome the dichotomy of biological behavior and religious behavior are richer subjects than can be adequately addressed in a short paper. Obviously I find the distinction of nature and culture artificial, and agree with Michael Carrithers that "... there is no need to sever ourselves as a species from the larger book of natural history."<sup>22</sup> In trying to think of religion and culture independently of nature and natural behaviors, I am afraid we have in fact so severed ourselves. And in advocating that we close the gap it is not just my point that somehow behavioral science has now to inform religious studies but also, since religion is itself part of nature's performance, the other way around as well.

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be called "escape behaviors." Benson Saler, "Biology and Religion: On Establishing a Problematic," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11: 386-394 (1999).

<sup>22</sup> Michael Carrithers, *Why Humans Have Cultures: Explaining Anthropology and Social Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 86, n. 17.

# COMPARATIVISM AND SOCIOBIOLOGICAL THEORY<sup>1</sup>

LUTHER H. MARTIN

## *Summary*

While the “academic study of religion” is often considered to be synonymous with “comparative religion,” little attention has been given by scholars of religion to theories of comparison. When scholars of religion turn to the social sciences, as they often do in matters of theory, they find the situation with respect to comparison is little better. Recent attention to such theoretical reflections on comparative methods among some social scientists have, however, reopened the question of “human universals,” themes familiar to scholars of religion from the phenomenology of religions but increasingly eschewed by them as ahistorical, at best, and theologically shaped, at worst. If, however, comparative studies are to avoid metaphysical musings and ethnocentric excesses, they might best proceed on the theoretical basis of natural, species-specific characteristics of human beings and demonstrate the relationships among the biological and cognitive constraints on human beings, on the one hand, and their social and historical constructions, on the other.

Whatever else “religion” may be, it is a social fact and human sociality seems to be one “universal” characteristic of human beings about which there seems to be some consensus among representatives of the various sciences. This paper looks at some of the biological and cognitive explanations proposed for human sociality, outlines a social — and parallel religious — typology based on such explanations, and suggests in a preliminary way a “test” for this typological hypothesis against ethnographic/historical data from two ancient but disparate cultures, China and Greece.

A little over a decade ago, participants in a conference on theory and method, held in Warsaw and sponsored by the Polish Society for the Science of Religions and the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), concluded that the history of religions

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<sup>1</sup> A first draft of this paper, entitled “Comparativism and Social Theory” was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Montreal, 6-8 November, 1998. It is given here in a revised and expanded version.

might well be reconceived as “a human and cultural science” in which “religion” would be understood “as a reality which interconnects social activities.” Consequently, analyses of “social processes which are correlative with religious phenomena would require the evaluation and use of innovative social theories and models . . . Whether such a methodological orientation” would “prove fruitful” was to “be judged in the context of future research” (Tyloch 1990: 8). Although historians of religion have increasingly turned towards the social sciences for theoretical and methodological insights, especially to anthropology and the cognitive sciences, any theoretical basis for a comparative method remains, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., William E. Paden, Benson Saler, Jonathan Z. Smith) elusive, still bound largely to romantic but finally ethnocentric generalizations of hermeneutic affirmation, a tradition seriously challenged only by the penetrating but particularistic insights of postmodernist parochialism.

The general absence of a theoretical basis for comparativism among historians of religions is not surprising given the absence of much attention to comparative research among the social sciences to which the Warsaw conference recommended attention. Two years prior to that conference, Melvin Kohn, the president of the American Sociological Association (ASA), wrote in the announcement of the theme for the 1988 ASA annual convention that:

The time has long passed, if it ever existed, when it is sensible to generalize from findings based on studies done entirely within the United States, without asking whether our findings are descriptive only of the U.S. or would apply as well to other developed countries, to other Western countries, to other capitalist countries, to other countries in general. (Kohn 1989: 18)

And Stefan Nowak, in his contribution to the volume resulting from responses to the theme of that ASA convention, noted an essential “gap” between those comparative social studies which have been produced and the theoretical enterprise. The explanatory principles of social theory, he concluded, were “intended by the founding fathers of sociology to be valid for broad spatiotemporal regions of the world.” For many of the “classical” sociologists, consequently, the call for “‘comparative’ sociological study would sound redundant”

(Nowak 1989: 34). Kohn's and Nowak's observation that little or no attention has been given to the formulation and testing of social theories based explicitly upon comparative research and which might produce generalizations valid for "mankind in general" (Nowak 1989: 34) remains today largely unaddressed.<sup>2</sup>

The notion of social scientific generalizations based explicitly upon comparative studies and theoretically formulated as more or less valid for "mankind in general" poses the issue of "human universals," i.e., behaviors or patterns of behavior common to the species *Homo sapiens*. In his survey of research on this theme, published a year after that of the proceedings of the IAHR conference in Warsaw, Donald Brown concluded that American anthropology, at least, has been dominated by a view of culture as an arbitrary, locally constructed *sui generis* phenomenon that is irreducible to other determinants of human behavior such as biology or psychology (Brown 1991: 6, 56, 63 n. 5, 71, 144) and that this view has precluded much research on "human universals" as a basis for comparative theorizing. By contrast, a "comparative religion" has traditionally been constructed precisely on the assumption that "religion" is an irreducible, *sui generis* phenomenon (McCutcheon 1997). The difference is that "comparative religion" has been based on theologizing suppositions about a universal sacrality (Martin 2000a, 2000b) whereas anthropology has been based on historicist assumptions concerning the unique character of every human society (Brown

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<sup>2</sup> A quick survey of articles published in *JSSR* since Kohn's appeal exemplifies his concern about the "parochial" character of research in the United States in social-scientific studies of religion (Kohn 1989: 17-20). Although a number of studies on aspects of other cultures have been published in this journal during the last decade, only three articles might be described as cross-national (van Driel-van Belzen 1990; Campbell-Curtis 1994; Stark 1997) and only two articles and one "research note" are explicitly based on cross-cultural research (Ponton-Gorsuch 1988; McClenon 1988; H. Johnston 1989). This relative dearth of published comparative research in the study of religion found relief only in the publication in 1998 of an issue of *JSSR* addressing the theme of the 1997 meeting of SSSR, "Religious Borderlands," especially a section on "Religion in Global Perspective."

1991: 5).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, in consequence of the “Concluding Statement” of the IAHR Warsaw conference, students of religion might benefit from social-scientific expertise in the formulation of testable theories while at the same time challenging social scientists to base their social theories on comparative research and to test their validity, thereby, for “mankind in general.”

# I

One “universal” characteristic of human beings and, consequently, of their religiosity, about which there seems to be some consensus among representatives of the various sciences and which I should like to explore here is “sociality” (Wilson 1975: 16-18; Carrithers 1992, esp. 1, 55-75; for religion, Paden 1998, 2000). I define sociality, with Michael Carrithers, as “an inherited [‘capacity for complex social behaviour’] . . . established through the force of natural selection” (Carrithers 1992: 34, 38). As we all now know, the DNA of any two humans is 99.9% identical, all of which is constituted by various combinations of but four chemical units. How do you get from such simplicity to the complexity of the human brain, and from the complexity of individual brains to the diversity of social relationships in which individual minds are deployed? The answer, according to one commentator, is fairly easy: “[y]ou just build one layer of complexity on top of another until you have what you need” (Wade 2000).<sup>4</sup> Whether the inherited character of the human social imperative and its consequent complexity might better be explained by the structure of the human brain itself, as suggested by Lévi-Strauss; as a domain-specific competency of human cognition, as argued by Lawrence Hirschfeld (1989, 1994); as cultural elaborations of biology, as suggested by Walter Burkert (1996);

<sup>3</sup> Social scientists who specialize in the study of religion often fall into the same sort of theologized *sui generis* assumptions about religion as do historians of religion (Krymkowski-Martin 1998). This is not surprising given their proclivity to generalization based primarily if not solely on research in the American (or Western) context.

<sup>4</sup> The issue of explaining cultural complexity on the basis of simplicity has been addressed on the level of human cognition by Lawson and McCauley 1990.

or on the basis of the “reciprocal altruism” posited as a genetically encoded “default” behavior — which might offer an explanation for the other three (Wright 1994: 188-209) — the problem of accounting for the diversity of human sociality, and thus of religions, remains.

W. Robertson Smith was perhaps the first comparativist to recognize that religion must be accounted for by its social nature (Kardiner-Preble 1961: 73, n. 2). “Every human being,” Smith averred, “without choice on his own part, but simply in virtue of his birth and upbringing, becomes a member of . . . a *natural society*” (Smith 1889: 29) — whatever any given society might hold to constitute “natural” (Fox 1967: 39-41). In his classic article on “The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior,” W.D. Hamilton demonstrated mathematically that the mere coming together of the sexes and parental care is underdeterminative for the social organization of any species (Hamilton 1964: 1). “[F]or a gene to receive positive selection,” he concluded:

it is not necessarily enough that it should increase the fitness of its bearer above the average if this tends to be done at the heavy expense of related individuals, because relatives, on account of their common ancestry, tend to carry replicas of the same gene; and conversely . . . a gene may receive positive selection even though disadvantageous to its bearers if it causes them to confer sufficiently large advantages on relatives (Hamilton 1964: 17).

In other words, Hamilton’s argument stipulated that such notions as Smith’s “natural society,” defined anthropologically by “birth and upbringing,” might better be explained in terms of a larger kinship group defined by “inclusive fitness,” i.e., a subordination of the individual to the survival of those relatives who share many of the individual’s genes.<sup>5</sup>

While kin recognition clearly has a “natural” basis, it is worth emphasizing that the criteria for kin selection among humans are not restricted to biology — which is, of course, a very modern system of knowledge that, indeed, “demonstrates and quantifies the kinship of all life on Earth” (Park 2000: 81). Rather, what humans consider kinship refers more to relationships and differentiations that are socially constructed and defined (Fox 1967: 39), as the political instance of kin alliances through marriage and the juridical case of kin recruitment through adoption make clear (for a good general discussion of kinship issues, with bibliography, see Fox 1967). As Smith already put it, “[t]he idea that kinship is not purely an affair of birth, but may be acquired, has quite fallen out of our circle of ideas” (Smith 1889: 273). In the more recent summary of Eric Wolf, “[p]atterns of kinship may be used to expand the scope of social and ideological linkages, and such linkages may become major operative factors in the jural and political realm” (E. Wolf 1997: 89). Although largely neglected by Smith (and Wolf), the preeminent technique for the acquisition of kin apart from birth and marriage is adoption (but see Smith 1885: 52-54). This adoptive strategy of kin recruitment could be extended not only to sons (and daughters) but to ancestors, including heroes and deities as well; and commemoration of the ancestors held in common and linked to the present by genealogical narratives of descent, establishes the collective identity for a particular groups and provides their *raison d'être* (for the relationship between kinship and society/culture, see also the classic studies of Coulanges 1873: 40-116 and Durkheim 1915: esp. 309-333). Adoptive subordination establishes fictive kin groups that have nothing to do, of course, with the survival of genes but rather with the survival of “memes.”

In his now classic study of “the selfish gene,” Richard Dawkins (1976) coined the term “meme” to name units of cultural transmission which, he suggests, might be understood as “analogous to genetic transmission” (Dawkins 1976: 192). “Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so,” he suggests, “memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad

sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins 1976: 192).<sup>6</sup> The subordination of the individual to a group that shares many of the same memes is a social principle of inclusive fitness that governs rules of social formation and maintenance and that provides a "powerful force of social cohesion" often expressed as kinship (Park 2000: 36; for more recent discussions of memes, see Dennett 1995: 335-370, 473-476; Brodie 1996; and Sperber 1996: 100-108). In the definition of Wolf, such kinship organization involves "(a) symbolic constructs ('filiation/marriage; consanguinity/affinity') that (b) continually places actors, born and recruited, (c) into social relations with one another" (E. Wolf 1997: 91). In addition to societies organized explicitly in terms of kinship claims, e.g., brotherhoods and fraternities, members of memetically constituted kin societies may, of course, imagine themselves in terms of any number of socio-political institutions with which they are familiar: various forms of secret or counter-cultural societies, revived or exotic religious cults, or political alternatives. All tend, however, to retain, in various degrees, kinship claims that differentiate insiders from outsiders, and kinship relations that structure their internal organization.

The significance of kinship societies, whether natural or fictive and however imagined, is heightened by contrast with the emergence of a second type of human social organization — kingship. In Smith's earlier formulation:

the primitive equality of the tribal system tends in progress of time to transform itself into an aristocracy of the more powerful kins, or of the more powerful families within one kin . . . [with the consequence that] wealth begins to be unequally distributed (W.R. Smith 1889: 73).

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<sup>6</sup> Dawkins suggests that the transmission of memes might actually be "realized physically . . . as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men": "When you plant a fertile meme in . . . [another's] mind you literally parasitize . . . [that] brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell" (Dawkins 1976: 192). As Dawkins added in the new edition of his work: "If memes in brains are analogous to genes they must be self-replicating brain structures, actual patterns of neuronal wiring-up that reconstitute themselves in one brain after another" (Dawkins 1989: 323).

Hamilton's biological explanation for such transformation of the socio-political order involves the advantage to inclusive fitness that would be consequent upon the evolutionary emergence of discrimination between kin and non-kin (Hamilton 1964: 21). This recognition of kin, those who share in the same gene pool, or in the case of fictive kin alliances, the same meme pool, requires the forming of social hierarchies in which kin, natural or fictive, are distinguished from non-kin (creating, thereby, the problem of strangers and orphans), and in which internal rankings emerge in which close kin are distinguished from distant kin, the privileged kin are distinguished from the lesser, senior lines of descent from a common ancestor are distinguished from the junior, "lines rising to prominence" because of demographic oscillations, managements of "alliances, people, or resources," the effects of wars, etc. are distinguished from those in a "state of decline," and in which adopted, initiated, or nuptial newcomers are relegated to the lowest social rank (Hamilton 1964: 23; E. Wolf 1997: 94, 389). Relations of production and those of exchange between non-kin follow as does domination and political power (Carrithers 1992: 49). This tendency towards a biologically based "politicization" of social order is instantiated by examples from the ubiquitous pecking order among chickens to the dominance of alpha males among most social animals (Bekoff 1999) and is a socio-historical reality observable from the beginnings of human history (on hierarchy and religious structure, see Burkert 1996: 80-101). It is, in other words, likely that our human ancestors evolved adaptations in response to recurrent problems faced by emergent human societies which included, among other adaptive mechanisms, cognitive "capacities for representing social dominance" (Hirschfeld 1999: 580). This evolutionary possibility for the construction of human social hierarchies has given rise to the "Machiavellian Intelligence Hypothesis" which posits that "advanced cognitive processes . . . are primarily adaptations to the *special complexities of . . . social lives* rather than only to nonsocial environmental problems such as finding food" (Whiten 1999: 495; also Byrne-Whiten 1988). Claims to kinship can thus function at two levels, that of the domestic or local group and that of the political order (E. Wolf 1997: 89).

Since, as Michel Foucault has emphasized, all social relationships, whether individual or collective, are relationships of power, the difference between these two “ideal types” of social organization might be formulated in terms of a differing distribution of power (Sheridan 1980: 183-185; Sagan 1985: 236, 240). Whereas power in kinship groups is disseminated more or less equally throughout the society with kin ordering establishing the upper limits of internal differentiation (E. Wolf 1997: 94), kingships are characterized by an escalating consolidation of power; and the one tends to follow upon the other. Such consolidations of power represent a challenge to local distributions of power even as the continuing existence of local power threatens that of ascendant authority. When a particular distribution of power or a proposal for a particular distribution of power is legitimated by claims to the authority of some superhuman referent, then we may speak of “religion” as a taxon formally differentiated from other taxa such as politics or economics with their own claims to the legitimating authority of historically constituted power, whether or not such taxa are actually differentiated in any given social domain. Although it is important to understand how and why various types of social organization have, in different historical cases, developed and extended their domains of power (E. Wolf 1997: ix), I am suggesting a sociological extension of biological or anthropological uses of “kinship” as a universal idiom or “ideal type” of socio-political, including religious, organization, that stands as an alternative to that of “kingship.”

If comparative studies are to avoid metaphysical musings, on the one hand, and ethnocentric excess, on the other, they might best proceed on the theoretical basis of natural, species-specific characteristics. I have selected one of the most fundamental of these traits, the apparently innate social character of human beings. As Robertson Smith already argued, human beings are necessarily social creatures engaged in social formation. Anthropologists since Smith have agreed that there are but two types of social — and hence religious — formations: kinship and kingship, alternative distributions of power, whether in the political or in the religious domains, that are amenable, however, to an infinite number of social variations and cultural permutations. The

study of such social formations, then, must lead to the study of their development over time and in terms of the contingent characteristics of different locales.

## II

If a theory of comparativism is to be accorded any validity, its explanatory power for "mankind in general" must be tested against the myriad examples of historical particularities which in aggregate are styled human culture. Like any theoretical construct, the kinship/kingship model is itself, of course, a historically specific product. Its view of the state as a federation governed by a king and its difference in kind from the family and its head was first described in the fourth century BCE by Aristotle (*Pol.* 1.1-2) and, somewhat later, in the epic of Israel (Lemche 1998: 130). The latter's narrative account of the religio-political federation of a number of middle eastern tribes, of their construction of a genealogy to establish claims of common descent in support of this federation, and of the emergence of a kingship from the federation's patriarchal council is too well known to repeat in detail. Whatever might be concluded about the historicity of events recounted in this epic, it does offer, in narrative form, a theoretical model for the socio-political organization and development from kinship to kingship of a particular people upon which, of course, W. R. Smith based his own reflections. I should like, therefore, briefly to suggest the comparative utility of the kinship/kingship model of socio-religious organization with reference to two other, roughly contemporary but geographically disparate, examples from antiquity: relations between kin and king in ancient Greece and China.<sup>7</sup>

Beginning in 336 BCE, Alexander III (the Great) of Macedonia successfully established his sovereignty over the lands he conquered from Greece to Persia to the Indus River. With more success than not, he attempted consolidation of the lands he conquered by establishing

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<sup>7</sup> While I consider the "roughly contemporary" character of the following examples to be historically interesting, I do not necessarily consider it to be theoretically relevant.

an *oikoumenē* of Greek language and culture, a program continued by his factious successors until the reestablishment of consolidated empire under Rome in 30 BCE. Similarly, in 221 BCE, Ch'in Shih Hwang-ti ("the first august emperor") began his conquest of the independent warring states of China and his consolidation of the Chinese empire. Following a revolt against Ch'in rule in 206 BCE, the Han dynasty presided over a unified Chinese empire until its collapse in 220 CE. In both cases, the successful establishment of a kingship type of political organization required strategies which diminished local kin and ethnic identities and the transfer of these allegiances to that required by an overriding imperial power. As Aristotle observed:

just as the master's rule is a sort of monarchy in the home, so absolute monarchy is domestic mastership (*oikonomia*) over a city, or over a race (*ethnos*) or several races. (Arist. *Pol.* 3.10.2)

Thus, even as Alexander — or his followers — appropriated traditional kinship categories by calling for a universal kingship of mankind in support of his imperial rule (e.g., Arrian 7.11; Diod. 18.4.4.; Plut. *Mor. De Alex. fort.* I.329C-D), so the Han dynasty, which supported Confucianism as the basis of the state, appropriated traditional kinship categories in support of kingship with the addition of fealty of subject to emperor to tradition precepts of "filial piety": subjection of son to father, of younger to elder brother, of wife to husband, and of youth to age (including the ancestors).

Political allegiance was further strengthened in both Greece and China by juridical attempts to weaken kinship structures at their base, namely, ancestor veneration which provided the genealogical as well as legal basis for kinship identity. Funerary legislations controlling and limiting interaction with the dead weakened kin allegiances in favor of allegiance to a larger political entity (S. Johnston 1999: 45, 97-98). The official establishment of cemeteries outside the city walls, for example, distanced the ordinary dead from the city (S. Johnston 1999: 98). And the purification of Delos by removing the dead from the island in 426 BCE exemplified the consolidation of Athenian rule over the island by separating its inhabitants from their own history, even as the

universalization of kinship attributed to Alexander attempted to negate local kin allegiances in favor of a politically consolidated *oikoumenē*. Similarly, the political transition to kingship in China was paralleled by a social relocation of the ancestors from their traditional habitation in a this-worldly, if transgenerational, realm of local kin-relations, to a common transcendental heavenly place shared by all (Needham 1974: 77-82).

In China as in Greece, the socio-political landscape of these dead mirrored, along with the society of gods, that of the living (S. Johnston 1999: 160; A. Wolf 1997: 131). Whereas relationships with the ancestors, as with kin generally, are permanent and involve assumptions of common welfare and mutual dependence, relations with the gods as with kings must be negotiated and continually renewed with offerings and shows of respect. The veneration of ancestors, in other words, represented and maintained transgenerational kin relations; on the other hand, obeisance to deities as to kings reflected political concerns that transcended kin allegiance (A. Wolf 1997: 168).

With the successful consolidation of empire, alternative social experiments and oppositional political groups abounded. From the outset of Alexander's conquests, associations of newly mobile immigrant groups, made possible by the newly cosmopolitan context of empire, began to proliferate. These "voluntary" associations were primarily organized as societies of fictive kin (Martin 1997). The evidence concerning some twenty-four such associations on the Greek island of Delos, for example, has been summarized as reinforcing "a sense of kinship and national identity" in a context "where disparate nationalities and languages abounded" (McLean 1996: 189). Similarly, "secret societies" emerged in the Chinese imperial context to provide those whose kinship bonds had been broken an alternative affiliation by which to promote their interests (Weckman 1987: 153). When the familial or ethnic rationale for membership in these groups became no longer compelling, as in cases of assimilation, mobility, or demise of the first generation, an adjustment was made in the membership criteria of these groups by which kin or ethnic status came to be conferred upon non-ethnic petitioners through initiation rites modeled on

the widespread juridical practice of adoption (see, e.g., *Od.* 4.561ff.; *Gal.* 4:4-5; *Rom.* 8:14, 23; *Apul. Met.* 5.29, 11.15-21). Some of the Hellenistic fictive kin societies, most of which claimed a native or ethnic deity as patron and many of which claimed the designation "mystery," evolved into the famous "mystery cults" of the Hellenistic world, in which formerly familial or native deities became universalized in order to provide patronage for their internationalized clientele (Rohde 1925: 221; Samter 1901: 102; Martin 1997). Claims to kinship with the deities themselves began to emerge in the Hellenistic world from first century BCE (*Ps.Pl. Ax.* 371D) and became common among various of those latter Hellenistic traditions generally designated "gnostic."

The "kinship" organization of alternative societies inalterably established them, in both Greece and China, as political entities in contrast to "kingship" types of organization in which power was claimed by the centralized administration of the state. It is this dichotomy of socio-political organization and not political disenfranchisement that cast the fictive kin associations as polities in contrast to efforts at imperial politics. Rather than viewing these groups as a reaction to a world understood in negative terms, an "age of anxiety," for example, or, as compensations for social dislocation or political disenfranchisement, we might better view these groups as innovative social experiments under the radically altered socio-political conditions that characterized the emergence of kingships.

### III

What is required for comparative studies is development of the theoretical relationship between the biological and cognitive conditions for and constraints on the practices of *H. sapiens*, on the one hand, and the luxuriance of historically constructed socio-cultural, including religious, expressions, on the other. In other words, this approach does not address the historical complexities that characterize and differentiate the religio-socio-political productions of each and every culture. Rather, biologically based constraints call attention to and give an explanation for the ubiquitous presence of commonality among various human societies, what, following Carrithers, we might term the bio-

logical and cognitive archive of human possibilities (Carrithers 1992: 4) along with their diverse socio-cultural produce. And the perception of these commonalities throw into sharp relief that which is not shared among these same societies, namely, the idiosyncratic meanings attached by every human society to their structural commonalities. As postulated by Pascal Boyer:

Religious concepts seem to combine certain schematic assumptions provided by intuitive ontologies, with nonschematic ones provided by explicit cultural transmission. . . . [T]he stable elements, which are recurrent in the religious systems of many different human groups, are not . . . [the] historically contingent assumptions. . . . [Religious judgements that differ from one human group to another] are mostly constrained by the activation of intuitive ontologies, that is, by something that is not transmitted culturally and in fact is not "cultural" at all (Boyer 1994: 121, 154).

The situation is more complex than a simple recognition of this relationship between biology and construction, however, since the development of self-reflexivity among human beings means that biology is not determinative but that its default programming may be overridden. And, it must be remembered, as Eric Wolf has so forcefully argued, that "human populations [in antiquity as in modernity] construct their cultures in interaction with one another, and not in isolation" (E. Wolf 1997: xv, 3, 5). It is the evolutionary development of the cognitive override and the various histories of the exercise of that override and their interaction that finally explains the specific characteristics that differentiate all human socio-cultural constructions.

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COMPARATIVE RELIGION, TAXONOMIES AND  
19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PHILOSOPHIES OF SCIENCE:  
CHANTEPIE DE LA SAUSSAYE AND TIELE

THOMAS RYBA

*Summary*

It has been generally recognized that an important influence on the development of early phenomenologies of religion was Hegel. It is the purpose of this paper to provide a deep reading of the phenomenologies of C.P. Tiele and P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye in order to demonstrate the extent of Hegel's influence on their thought. This demonstration proceeds *deconstructively* (in the Heideggerian, not the Derridean, sense) to establish (a) the questionability of each thinker's claim to represent a unitary science of religion and to show (b) the oppositions between the respective notions of taxonomy and the notions of science of religion. The paper concludes by suggesting that although both thinkers may have appropriated some Hegelian evolutionary elements, their respective conceptions of science were also influenced by the "received" view that lay behind the writings of *scientific* phenomenologists such as Robison, Hamilton and Whewell.

*Introduction*

Throughout comparative religion's relatively brief history, scholars such as Jastrow, Jordan, Smith and Paden have often commented on the fondness of comparative religionists for the appropriation of taxonomic strategies and methods from other sciences such as Botany, Zoology, Comparative Anatomy, Linguistics, etc. (Jastrow, 1981/1901; Jordan, 1986/1905; Braun, 2000, 35-44; Paden, 1994, 41-43). Sometimes this appropriation has been consistent with the broader philosophical assumptions of the lending disciplines, more often than not, however, this appropriation has been syncretistic and piecemeal, a makeshift bricolage of classificatory methods and ideological aims fundamentally at odds with one another. When the appropriation of extra-disciplinary taxonomic methods proved useful, the stark incongruity of coupling them to alien ideologies made those ideologies seem

nugatory. All too often, the interpretive charity exercised by scholars projected a unity behind these syncretisms, even when their internal oppositions could not be reconciled.

It is the purpose of this paper to sketch a *deconstructive* archaeology of two examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century science of religion so as to uncover the scientific philosophies lying beneath their respective notions of religious science and taxonomic methods. This entails a distinction designed to serve the following argument. It is a distinction between the *meta-scientific* dimension of these religionists' understanding of their labors and the *intra-scientific* dimension of their labors. The first addresses the question "What do these religionists conceive science (and, more particularly, the *science* of religion) to be?" The second addresses the question "How is the comparison and classification of religions to be accomplished within their conceptions of the science of religion?" Emergent from these two questions is the third question of importance to the purpose of this paper; it is: "What exactly is the relationship between the meta-scientific and intra-scientific aspects of taxonomy practiced by these religionists?" The sciences of religion for discussion are those of: (1) P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye and (2) C.P. Tiele.

Obviously, so much has been written about the religious methods and theories of these two religionists as legitimately to raise the question, "Why would yet another treatment be required?" With the consternation implied in this question, I am sympathetic, my only defense being that — to my knowledge — no one has asked the question in precisely this form. Just because they haven't thus formulated it, I believe that an aspect of the syncretistic nature of comparative religion has been overlooked. This myopia would seem to be reason enough to return to these sources, even if in doing so we are a bit like the proverbial dog returning to his *ejectus* (2 Peter 2:22).

The organization of the remainder of this paper follows in three parts. First, I will give a close reading of those portions of Chantepie's *Manual* and Tiele's *Elements* which provide formulations of the science of religion and the role taxonomy plays in each. Second, I will describe the oppositions that occur in each formulation and show how

these oppositions (a) undermine their claims to be presenting unitary sciences of religion and (b) conflict with the taxonomic methods proposed. Third, I will conclude with some brief observations about lessons to be learned from all of the foregoing.

### *I. Close Readings of Two 19<sup>th</sup> Century Sciences of Religion*

#### *A. Science and taxonomy in P.D. Chantepie de la Saussaye's Manual of the Science of Religion*

*Meta-scientifically*, Chantepie de la Saussaye conceptualizes his “science of religion” against the backdrop of the Hegelian understanding of philosophy and the German understanding of *Religionswissenschaft*. According to Chantepie, four components were required for the realization of this new science: (1) three modes/methodologies for its study (the “metaphysical, psychological, and historical” approaches), (2) a philosophy of history, particularly the history of civilization (to reveal “the connection of religion to the other sides of life”), (3) the contents of its subject matter (“archeology, philology, ethnography, psychology of nations, mythology and folklore”), and (4) its object — the study of religion in its essence and manifestations (Chantepie, 1891, 3-8).<sup>1</sup>

In working out its intra-scientific placement, Chantepie stipulates that specific relationships define the boundaries between the science of religion and theology. Thus, (1) “The unity of religion in the variety of its forms . . . is presupposed by the science of religion” (9); (2) “The science of religion” and theology “follow separate paths . . . and (3) have separate objects in view” though (4) “they must mutually help one another” (10). The object-field of religious science is contrasted to that of *partisan* theology, which is tied to a single historical religion. Nevertheless, he suggests that they are not entirely *incommunicado*.

As to the historical sources for his notion of the science of religion, Chantepie credits Hegel as the founder of the discipline because in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he proposed the three modes

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<sup>1</sup> For economy's sake, subsequent page citations in this section will follow parenthetically but with author's name and date of publication suppressed.

— “metaphysical [or logical], psychological, and historical” — for its study. This claim about *topos* is a bit of a simplification, however. In the Hegelian corpus there are actually *four* sites that have significance for an understanding of Chantepie’s science of religion: the one Chantepie mentions explicitly (namely, Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*), and three which remain unmentioned but are, nevertheless, allusively referenced in the way he describes his science. The concealed sources are the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Without these other sources, the reasons for Chantepie’s claim that not all three modes are a part of philosophical science would not be intelligible.

According to Chantepie, only the metaphysical and the psychological approaches to religion are *formally* philosophical, history (according to Hegel) being treated as the *material* of philosophical analysis, which is not properly philosophical. The analysis of the essence of religion corresponds to the philosophy of religion (subdivided into the metaphysics and psychology of religion), while the description of this essence’s manifestations in humankind’s cultural world corresponds to the history of religion (subdivided into ethnography and history), with taxonomy (or “[t]he collecting and grouping of various phenomena”) forming “the transition from the history to the philosophy of religion” (8).

Chantepie is very direct in asserting that his *only* concern in the *Manual* is the historical. The philosophical — which would treat religion according to its “subjective and objective sides” — is reserved for the philosophy of religion (8). But he straightaway vitiates this segregation of subject matter by including phenomenology of religion in the *Manual*, as he puts it, to expand the restrictiveness of his discussion, despite obvious philosophical difficulties (8). The reason why this is something of a violation of his intended schematization is that the purported Hegelian model for Chantepie’s organization makes this sequence problematic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In all fairness, the peculiarity of this organization might still be legitimated on Hegelian grounds by arguing that even though Chantepie excludes philosophical

In the classification of religions, Chantepie again references Hegel, committing himself to the taxonomic principles Hegel approves, but without accepting the Hegelian *taxa*. Following Hegel, Chantepie argues that taxonomic divisions in the study of religion must not be made according to the “subjective sense” but must reflect “the necessary division in the objective sense of the nature of the mind” (50-51). This means that any taxonomic arrangement of religions must reflect “the stages of the development of the idea and at the same time of its concrete manifestation” (51). Thus taxonomy should reflect (1) the development of the idea of religion in its unity, (2) the development of religion’s many-sided manifestations, and (3) the relations between 1 and 2. The notion of development demands a sequential arrangement from lower to higher, though Chantepie does not think Hegel proposed any arrangement, which was adequate. Chantepie, recognizing the “great importance,” *consistency* and *completeness* of naturalistic — or, as he puts it, “mechanical” — approaches to the evolution of the sub-organic, organic and super-organic, ultimately rejects, on very vague axiological, teleological and historical grounds, any such radical approach to the study of religion (10-11). He resorts to a developmentalism that is not completely naturalistic.

According to Chantepie, a thoroughgoing nominalization of the data cannot result in scientific classifications. What is required is taxonomy based upon essential characteristics, the two recognized varieties being genealogy and morphology (51). The genealogical approach, although it “has borne ample fruit,” is only as good as the discernment of religion’s “leading features” and is, thus, only useful as the “practical object” of historical surveys.<sup>3</sup> (51-52) By “leading features” Chantepie

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analysis from his *Manual*, he does provide a *philosophical* history (in the Hegelian sense). Even in this case, his actions stand in opposition to his avowed intentions, and this conflict of motives indicates deeper philosophical issues lie below the text’s choppy surface. (See the later discussion in this paper and, especially, Hegel, 1956, 1-102.)

<sup>3</sup> Chantepie’s use of the term “practical” here may be intended to mirror the Hegelian notion of *pragmatical history* as the present reconstruction of the past on the basis of the values of the present. Thus, the “leading features” of such *genealogical*

intends whatever is most noteworthy about a religion according to some present practical aim, but what may not be really *essential* to it. The problem is that doing a genealogy of religions as defined by *noteworthy* traits is to take as object a *genetic soup* of environmental traits, the vicissitudes of culture and history, from which it is difficult to disentangle those traits which are uniquely religious. Because of their mixed historical parentage, religions carry many *genetic segments* that are non-religious. Morphology, because it is founded upon essential qualities, is more philosophical in the Hegelian sense and is thus to be preferred (51).

Among the *morphai* which Chantepie lists as possibly (but not necessarily) defining religious *taxa* are: true-false, natural-revealed, popular-personal, monotheistic-polytheistic, mythological-dogmatic, rationalistic-aesthetic-ethical, ecstatic-depressed, particular-universal and, most importantly, natural-moral (53-54). Although he gives no unqualified assent to any particular taxonomy, he thinks that the scholarly consensus about the distinction between natural religion, on one side, and the intellectual-moral, on the other, has a validity that was originally presaged by Hegel (56).

The introduction of the notion of phenomenology into a discussion of historical data poses unique problems, particularly inasmuch as Chantepie identifies the inspiration of his science of religion as Hegel, an inspiration which ought to exclude phenomenology from either the philosophical divisions of Logic or the Philosophy of Nature, on one hand, or from History, on the other. But — with apologies to be sure — Chantepie places his discussion of phenomenology precisely within history, the last place according to the Hegelian philosophy of science where it ought to belong. This is odd in itself, but the way Chantepie

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re-constructions may not be based on the necessary features of the things (or historical events), as they were, but according to the values and interests we impose upon them from our present vantage point. This sort of history/genealogy may result in the discovery of the present in the past, a discovery which neglects the very uniqueness and — to employ an overused term favored in these postmodern times — *otherness*. Only as the chosen “leading features” coincide with the essential features do we come close to the *morphological* approach that Chantepie favors. (See: Hegel, 1965, 5-7.)

renders the content of that phenomenology makes his valorization of Hegel odder still. Let us look briefly at the role Chantepie assigns phenomenology.

Paying lip service to the Hegelian formulation, Chantepie describes the phenomenology of religion in such a way that suggests it might find placement in the sequence of the sciences like that of the phenomenology of spirit in *the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. From his description of it as being connected with psychology, “the facts of human consciousness,” and as something to be explained on the basis of inward mental processes and relations, one might think that it is this dimension which Chantepie would chose to address, even out of place as it would be, in his *Manual* (67). But he doesn’t. Trying to circumvent the definitional circle that has plagued phenomenologies of all stripes, Chantepie defers the “accurate definition of the character of religious phenomena to philosophy, and content[s] . . . [himself] with classifying the most important ethnographic and historical material connected with the phenomena of religion” (67). Clearly, there has been a shift in Chantepie’s own understanding of his task. What began primarily as a work of history has now become a work of taxonomy, taxonomy being the bridge discipline between history and philosophy.

#### B. Science and Morphology in C.P. Tiele’s *Elements of the Science of Religion*

The science of religion was sufficiently established by the time Tiele wrote the *Elements* that he could plausibly claim that it had “secured itself a place among the various sciences of the human mind” (2).<sup>4</sup> But what exactly does Tiele mean by a “science of religion”? Taking “religion” first, Tiele claims no preconceptions about the object of his science; this object, “[w]hat religion really is in its essence,” can only be “ascertained as the result of . . . [the] whole investigation” (4). Still, some rough approximation is needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Again, for economy’s sake, subsequent page citations in this section will follow parenthetically but with author and date suppressed.

To answer this need, Tiele provides nothing more than a *recursive* operational definition, which — because of its oppositional structure — is anticipatory of other definitional approaches of Saussurean lineage.<sup>5</sup> Religion, according this operational definition is “the aggregate of all those phenomena which are invariably termed religious, in contradistinction to ethical, aesthetical, political, and others,” that is “manifestations of the human mind in words, deeds, customs, and institutions which testify to . . . [the] belief in the superhuman, and serve to bring [one] . . . into relation with it” (4). Anything lying beyond the “range of the perceptible,” beyond “scientific or philosophical reasoning,” is no phenomenon for this new science, but for Tiele, it is an open question whether metaphysics or philosophy can take anything beyond human perception as their object (4-5). The science of religion takes no such objects; its objects are the human *thematizations* of the superhuman, humankind’s *beliefs* in the superhuman. These are within the purview of science because they are “historical-psychological, social, and wholly human” phenomena (5).

What does Tiele view as science, then? He intends nothing “presumptuous,” nothing which in its claims or hypotheses overreaches its own methods; rather, he intends by “science” whatever can be learned by “a sound and critical method” complementary to its independent field (5). For a science to be a Tielean science, it must possess four features: (a) a sufficiently wide domain, (b) “a unity which embraces the multiplicity of facts belonging to that domain,” (c) “an inward connection of these facts which enables us to subject them to careful classification and to draw fruitful inferences from them,” and (d) fruitful,

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<sup>5</sup> The apparent notion, here, is that Religion as a sector of culture/human experience can best be known by a sort of *via negativa*. By subtracting all of the *essential* traits of the other cultural sectors, whatever remains would presumably be religious. The oddness of such a suggestion derives from the fact that to know religion exhaustively you must first exhaustively know the other parts of culture. This parallels the Saussurean notion that the complete meaning of a word is known only in opposition to all the other members of the semantic field of which it is a part. This may be true ideally, but it is hardly the way we learn a language or come to an appreciation of what “religion” denotes.

important and truthful results on the basis of a, b and c (6). Thus, the *domain* of religion is all human religious phenomena, the *unity* is the oneness of the human mind refracted differently through these phenomena at different developmental stages, the *inward connection* is the scientific classification of religions, and the *import* of this study is “self-evident” due to the value of its subject matter (6). The inward and outward objects of this new science correspond to the divisions of the *Essay*. The *morphological* — or *ontic* — part corresponds to the outward forms of religion, “the constant changes of form resulting from an ever-progressing evolution,” and the *ontological* part corresponds to the inward unity, “the unalterable element in transient and ever-altering forms . . . , the origin and the very nature of religion” (27).<sup>6</sup>

Though such a science of religion may seem threatening to the religious and anti-religious alike, new scientists of religion take no mind of such suspicions but subject religious phenomena “to unprejudiced

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<sup>6</sup> The distinction between the *ontic* and the *ontological* I have introduced, here, is not Tiele’s but comes from Martin Heidegger, who uses it in a way similar to Tiele. The following passage makes these similarities clear:

[S]cience is the founding of disclosure, for the sheer sake of disclosure, of the self-contained regions of whatever is, or as the case may be, of Being. . . . Ontic science makes a theme of any given being, which in a certain manner is already disclosed prior to scientific disclosure. We call the sciences of whatever is given — of a *positum* — positive sciences. Their objectification of whatever it is that they thematize is a direct continuation of the prescientific attitude toward this being. Ontology, or the science of Being, on the other hand, demands a fundamental shift of view: from whatever [concretely] is to Being. And this shift nevertheless keeps whatever is in view, but for a modified attitude. . . . [E]very positive science is *absolutely*, not relatively, different from philosophy.

Read in a Heideggerian light, Tiele’s distinction between morphology and ontology is the intra-scientific introduction of the distinction between Heideggerian philosophy and the individual sciences. Historically, the distinction between morphology and ontology as characterizing the meta-scientific structure of all science precedes Heidegger. However, Heidegger, in trying to save philosophy, makes it science’s orphan child, beginning the process now culminating in its (supposed) death. As we shall see below, the older view of the meta-scientific structure of the sciences is the one Tiele is following more closely. (See: Heidegger, 1976, 6.)

investigation" to understand its "essentials," its laws of "growth and decay"; in other words, they assume "an objective position toward all ["imperfectly" revealed] *forms* of religion," but distinguish "them carefully from religion itself" in order to get nearer to its source (9). This new science is not to be confused with theology whose aims are "to study, explain, justify, and . . . purify"; instead, its aims are "to investigate and explain, . . . to know what religion is, and why we are religious" (12).

Here, the objectivity of the philologist is the primary model for objectivity in the science of religion: "all religious forms are simply objects of investigation, different languages in which the religious spirit expresses itself," with as little concern for the differences between the religiously orthodox and heterodox as the philologist has for the differences between the grammatical structure of Finnish and Arabic (9). According to Tiele, objectivity does not — as some have maintained — necessarily entail skepticism; the aims of the science of religion may be accomplished by anyone who maintains objectivity in its study. Commitment to a religious tradition does not preclude a scientific appreciation of other religious forms (11). Neither championing religious belief, evaluating the superiority of these forms, nor reforming religion are, *per se*, the aims of the religionist, though the investigations of religious science may bear practical fruit with respect to such religious aims by providing an unbiased demonstration that religion is "rooted in . . . [humankind's] inmost nature" (10).

With respect to the nesting of a science of religion, Tiele distinguishes the "general and historical study of religions," on one hand, and the special theologies, on the other, from the science of religion. The first "observes, collects, combines, compares, and classifies facts in their order of development" while the second is about the business of religious legitimation — as described above. The science of religion should not be confused with either but independently uses their discoveries "for the purpose of determining what the religion manifested in all of these phenomena essentially is, and whence it proceeds" thus forming the "crown, or . . . center, to which they [these sciences] all converge" (13).

Tiele's science of religion is thus a special science and not — contrary to some of Chantepie's assertions — a part of general philosophy, though it may most "literally" be considered "the philosophy of religion," because it is concerned with the "philosophical part of the investigation of religious phenomena" as the science which seeks to "penetrate" through to the foundations of religious phenomena (15). This is philosophy of religion in a new vein, a philosophy "reformed" by the current state of science, though as a new *scientific* philosophy it does not take religion as simply either a "natural or artificial product" (15-16). Nor can the science of religion "apply the exact methods of the natural sciences" without "self-deception and grievous disappointment" (16).

What then are the methods of this new science, according to Tiele? Tiele proceeds by saying what they are exclusively not. They are not exclusively positivist-empirical — suited only to the ascertainment and classification of facts but "powerless to explain them"; they are not exclusively historical — resulting only in particulars; they are not at all genetic-speculative — "a mixture of history and philosophy" lacking in any unity; nor are they the purely speculative with no moorings anchoring them to earth (18). Surprisingly, Tiele describes the methods of the science of religion as deductive, the method furthest removed from the purely speculative, and the oldest and most reliable of Western epistemic instruments.

The religious-deductive method operates neither exclusively nor *aprioristically* but presupposes "the results yielded by induction, by empirical, historical, and comparative methods" so as to work from external "religious phenomena" (or religion's "outward manifestations") inwardly toward the discovery of a common psychology or "being" (18). Religionists must, therefore, "master" the data even though they are not responsible for discovering all of them (19). The result of this deductive *movement* is the construction of a naturalistic system for the explanation of the religious *psychê*, a system whose explanations must be subjected to "solid facts" (20). Central to the explanation of religious consciousness are the religious sentiments, "everything . . . which this frame of mind" vents and to which it gives utterance, the

complete set of religious words and actions according to the *recoverable* significance attached to them by believers (25). “In . . . the science as well as in the history of religion, those observances whose religious significance can be discovered and traced are alone valuable” (27).

The vast array of data immediately presents a problem. How are religionists to distinguish the significant from the insignificant, the “serviceable” from the unserviceable? (22) Tiele’s answer is that no data should be neglected, though *if compelled to economize* he would focus upon the data which come from each religion’s “fountainhead” — religious mythology, poetry, philosophy and doctrine — and leave religious ordinances and ritual for subsequent investigations (22). “[D]octrine . . . affords the most light” because it offers the skeleton key of explanation to “[c]ult, ritual and ceremonies” which “teach . . . nothing” without a doctrinal context (23). The reverse strategy — studying ritual and ordinance as primary — he views as absurd (14).

The taxonomic structure by which Tiele classifies his data is defined by the binary opposition of the morphological vs. the ontological, on one hand, and his characteristic understanding of development, on the other. Development has specific application to the first category (the morphological) because the religious forms and their radiations are the primary objects of its investigation. This variation is the process responsible for religious polymorphism. In contrast, the *gradient and direction* of this mutation — the measurement of a mutation’s movement toward a yet unachieved *telos* (or end) — serves, ultimately, to define what religion is. Thus, the Tielean notion of development has both observable as well as occult referents.

Tiele’s notion of development, like Chantepie’s, is vitalistic but without explicit Hegelian loadings. In fact, it is very similar to the notion proposed in Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.<sup>7</sup> By “development” Tiele intends a notion analogically ap-

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<sup>7</sup> Newman in his *Essay* lists seven “notes” or “tests” which characterize development of an idea in opposition to its corruption. They are: (1) preservation of the essential idea, (2) continuity of the principles upon which the idea has developed, (3) power of assimilation, (4) early anticipation, (5) logical sequence, (6) preservative additions,

plied from natural history to humankind's "high nature or spiritual life" (28). The admissibility of this analogy to religion he believes to have been borne out by "anthropological-historical investigation" as well as by an appeal "to no less an authority than Jesus Himself" in his simile of the mustard seed (29). Analogical though it may be, development as applied to religion requires appropriate definitional adjustment. Tiele distinguishes the features of this development as it refers to Religion and religions. Religious development — as it applies to both — means: (a) that the individual religion undergoing positive change exists as a "unity" behind its apparent polymorphism, (b) that the change is not "capricious" but follows a law-like sequence, later stages growing out of the earlier, (c) that the individual religion possesses an *entelechia* principle, its final form being present potentially in its earliest stage, (d) that each of these stages has "value, importance and right of existence," (e) that each stage is sublimated — in some sense — in a following stage, (f) that religion preserves its *genus* over and against other cultural domains (30-31). To this he couples the *law* of development, namely, that development may only occur with vigor if the religion is able to assimilate elements from its surrounding social ecology (239-243).

When relative to particular religions — the forms that Religion takes — development can be continuous or discontinuous, stagnant or dynamic, progressive or retrogressive, short-lived or long-lived and/or culturally dependent or independent (31-32). All religions — like individual *humans* — "have their periods of birth, growth, bloom and decline," but Religion — like *humankind* — evolves indefinitely (31-32). Here, Tiele is careful to point out that the relative changes that

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and (7) chronic continuance. A point by point comparison suggests that Newman's "tests" 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 & 6 (together) correspond to Tiele's characteristics a, b, law of assimilation, c and e. Though Tiele's characteristics of development are not discussed at length, as are Newman's, the resemblance suggests the possibility that he borrowed them from Newman or that both Tiele and Newman were appropriating a common source. To my knowledge, no one has yet discovered the source of Newman's "tests." (See: N. Lash, 1975 for the best treatment of the intellectual origins of Newman's idea of development.)

characterize the development of religions are often changes in mere “externals” and are not indicative of the change in Religion. Tiele apparently accepts a notion of accidental features of *taxa* like that of the naturalists. But for him there is no spontaneous emergence of religious features; they emerge always through the design and purpose of humans who deem “them the fittest expression of religious truth” (33). This intelligently guided selection is ultimately refined on the threshing-floor of human history, where ideas and practices outdated, stale, unfit and weak are winnowed out (34). Such changes, however, are the mere phenomena manifesting development, not the development itself. For a change in these particulars to occur, there must already have been a change in the consciousness (“the disposition, sentiment, and the attitude of mind”) of the humans responsible for it (35).

Tiele recognizes that such change is a “chicken or egg” problem. Though he is not clear as to whether changes in religious sentiment or conscience precede changes in conceptualization or reason, he does venture that there is a causal direction to religious change. Changes in humankind’s “general disposition and . . . views of life and the world are reflected” in religious ideas (35). The external features may be thus read as evidences of an inner law, life or Spirit which manifests a “continual advance” through its “temporary embodiments” (38).

Tied as it is to human consciousness, Religion paces its evolution. This connection Tiele describes as one of the objects of the science of religion. His working hypothesis (grounded in historical research) is that the law of the development of human consciousness is the law of the development of Religion (33). It might seem that this admission of “a development, subjected to certain laws, and produced by indwelling forces” is an admission that he has given himself over to a kind of naturalism, materialism or positivism, but he denies that this development precludes “the agency” and “revelation” of the supernatural any more than in one’s recognition of development in the physical world (51). The development is the revelation. It thus falls to the science of religion to prove that development occurs and, thus, to explain religious phenomena. But it is “an insoluble mystery” and

beyond any science's ability "to explain . . . what growth and life really are" and "how development takes place" (52).

Tiele's *taxa* are governed by the distinction between the "steps" or "stages" of development and the "directions" of religious development linked to different *ecologies* (54). The term "stage," here, is a bit misleading because it suggests a strict sequence to the emergence of forms, whereas what Tiele actually has in mind is the segmentation of a brachiolate (or cladistic) structure like that of a genealogy. The stages represent relative temporal positions on a genealogy indicating the emanation and growth of religions out of one another (54). To describe these *stages* Tiele prefers the phrase "forms of existence" (*morphai*), construing each form in such a way that the more developed forms contain the essential germs of preceding forms (55).

The "direction" of development of a religion is construed by Tiele to indicate the distance (or gradient of difference) of the branches (or *family* of related religious traditions) springing from some religious trunk, ancestor or bundle of root ideas (55). Each branch represents a "one-sided elaboration of one leading religious [root] idea . . . to its utmost consequences" expressing the "religious development" at a particular historical period (55). Again, Tiele identifies, here, another natural mechanism that corresponds to the Husserlian notion of perspectival variation, but it is one that relates the transformation of an idea against the changes in its cultural-historical base (Ryba, 1991, 211-212). The very one-sidedness of this development of root ideas means that other, equally essential, root ideas are temporarily forced "into the background" only to emerge as parallel religious traditions when their neglect, and thus their indispensability, becomes acute (55). Historical conditions determine whether these independent branches terminate, continue their parallel direction, or join (or rejoin) other parallel branches (56).

Thus far, Tiele has only described the nature of development; he has not described what descriptions may be attached to either the stages of development or their governing motifs. Tipping his hat — presumably, in the direction of Chantepie — by saying that his appropriation of Hegel did not detract from his "genius and learning," Tiele rejects the

classification of religions according to Hegelian philosophy, describing it as “a failure” and “useless” owing to the imperfection of the data (58). And though he has already given a general outline for such classification and comparisons, Tiele argues that the explosion of data all the more shows “how many gaps still remain” with respect to religious phenomena whose “original import and significance” has yet to be discovered (59). He, like Chantepie, modestly admits that “[a]ll classifications are . . . provisional” their boundaries being fuzzy and often overlapping (59). He, again like Chantepie, settles on a rough system of classification that distinguishes between nature-religions and ethical religions, following Whitney, Hartman, Caird, and others (60-61). Between these two religious types, he sees a major cleavage or division in the historical development of religion and a major distinction in leading ideas or governing motifs, a break which was nothing short of a religious revolution or catastrophic change, even though ethical religion had its embryonic start in the matrix of nature religion and shares many of its features (63-65). In his subdivision of these two stages, or “trunks,” he follows the method of Porphyrian bifurcations. Nature religions are divided into: (a) lowest nature-religions vs. highest nature-religions and ethical religions are divided into: (b) spiritualistic religions vs. revelation-religion and, finally, revelation-religion into nationalistic and universalistic religions (120, 148).

Specific differences (or differences in kinds of development) Tiele associates with the *directions* of development, mentioned above. By the “direction of a religious development” he intends “a spiritual current that sweeps along a single principle of religion, or some fundamental religious idea, . . . to its extreme consequences” (151). In biological terms, what Tiele describes here is analogous to biological mimicry or the modification of different functional parts so that they share the same apparent form. Thus, two religions with very different levels of development may share similar qualitative features, while two religions at the same level of development may be qualitatively very different (151). This possibility results from the set of historical vicissitudes, including nationality and origin (151). The direction of

religion differs from the stage of religion in that the latter does not define a sequence but a simple qualitative difference based upon the “root ideas” of each. Of particular importance are conceptualizations of the absolute, the relations between the believers and the absolute, and believers’ worldviews. Here, he distinguishes between *theanthropic* vs. the *theocratic* religions, the former having as its leading idea the presence of “the divine in man” the latter having as its leading idea the “supremacy of . . . [the divine] over the world of man and nature” (156).

Religion’s “fixed, permanent, and unchangeable element,” “its essential characteristics,” requires something like the natural counterpart to the Husserlian notion of perspectival variation — to become apparent. The essence can be gleaned “from the different forms which religion has assumed throughout the whole course of . . . history” (54). What religion is, is manifest in “how it has come to be” (54). But this does not make Religion a function of the sum of the adaptations of religions to their respective ecologies. Quite the reverse. What Religion is, is shown through the partial adumbration of all its possibilities. The study of Religion’s growth and origin may, indeed, parallel the sciences of “embryology and biology” (54). However, Tiele’s view is a reversal on the notion that ontogeny reproduces phylogeny. It is not the case that each individual religion reproduces the development of the classes of the religion to which it belongs. Instead, the phylogenetic development of religions is the expression of the underlying essence, or to put it in biological terms, phylogeny is the working out of the root-possibilities, or *genetics*, of religion, but *without* the possibility of genetic *mutation*. It is this non-Darwinian adaptive variation that shows us what Religion is, particularly in its most perfect forms. Tiele goes so far as to describe this goal of the investigation of this adaptive variation as the discovery of a religious *physiology* or *ontology* (2:188). He uses the word “ontology” to describe the second part of his *Elements* to contrast it with the *natural history* (morphology) constituting the first half. “Ontology” denotes what is changeless, in contrast to religions in their historical development, while “physiol-

ogy” designates an investigation that is not metaphysical but natural and related to the realization of human psychology (2:188).

Because Tiele thinks that the highest forms of Religion best reveal its nature in the same way that what is potential in the acorn is best revealed in the mature oak, he reads universalistic revelation religions of the theandric and theocratic varieties as the highest developments best showing Religion’s essence, though neither have yet achieved a resolution of this contrasting distinction (53). Thus, Tiele implies that the ultimate potential of Religion will be the resolution of the theandric and the theocratic, a resolution that can be found in the description of religion as the experience behind the compulsion to adoration (2:198).

## *II. The Deconstruction of the Chantepiean and the Tielean Sciences of Religion*

Having given a close, and therefore I hope fair, reading of the Chantepiean and Tielean conceptions of religious science, its structure and its taxonomic approach, I should now like to explain what conclusions we may draw from these notions. It is my contention that at the heart of both the Chantepiean and the Tielean conceptions of the science of religion are oppositions that cause a fundamental disintegrity. That this is so originates from the fact that they appropriated incompatible philosophical elements. These oppositions cut across discursive levels, across discussions of intra-scientific taxonomies and discussions of meta-scientific taxonomies. By this, I mean that their ideas of science (and the ways in which sciences are classified), whether internally inconsistent or consistent, stand in opposition to the respective intra-scientific taxonomies. In other words, there is a poor fit between the grand designs of their religious science and the way these designs shape religious taxonomy.

### *A. Oppositions in Chantepie’s notions of a science of religion*

In a very interesting and especially well-argued piece in *MTSR*, Tim Murphy argued that Hegelian themes were pervasive in the early History of Religion (Murphy, 1994). Although he may have overstated his thesis on some points, the importance of Hegelian philosophy

for the science of religion is unquestionable. But its importance does not establish its total hegemony. Here, I shall argue that the intellectual background to Chantepie and Tiele's appropriations of phenomenology and science were not simply Hegelian but more complex and mixed. These appropriations included philosophies of science outside of the absolute idealist spectrum.

In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel gives a blueprint for the organization of science which obviously influenced Chantepie as witnessed by his acceptance of the three methods for studying religion, the metaphysical, psychological and historical.<sup>8</sup> But I would like to suggest that an influence does not a Hegelian philosophy of religion make. In the *Encyclopedia*, this division mentioned by Chantepie corresponds to the division between (a) Logic (or metaphysics), (b) Natural Philosophy and (c) Psychology. As Murphy correctly notes, the relationship between the philosophic sciences and history is like the relationship between matter and form, or the material taken as the subject matter for analysis (Murphy, 1994, 127-128). But even when this form-matter metaphor is accepted, not all history necessarily becomes philosophical history. According to Hegel, history may be accomplished in *three* ways: (1) as original history, (2) as reflective history and (3) as philosophical history (Hegel, 1956, 1).

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<sup>8</sup> Curiously, Chantepie does not even address the possibility that a natural-scientific approach to the study of religion may be broached along Hegelian lines, but this probably has more to do with the way Hegel conceptualizes natural sciences — the Hegelian approach to natural philosophy having already been made obsolete by 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophies of science — and the way he places the study of history outside of the *Encyclopedia*, except in as much as it may be treated philosophically. It is probably also related to the fact that Hegel sees no role for the philosophy of natural science in the study of religion except as a preamble for testing the categories of the Logic in the natural world. Even so, there are a number of places in the second part of the *Encyclopedia* where there are discussions of natural development which have resonances in Chantepie's *Manual*. In many cases, these passages are derivative from the researches of previous naturalists, the patina of the Hegelian vocabulary being worn transparently by them.

Original history is unreflective and uncritically written from within the social world inhabited (and inherited) by the historian. Reflective history as *universal* history is written with the intent of contextualizing events against the backdrop of a nation or the world. Reflective history as *pragmatical* history — a variety of history which Chantepie views dimly, with good reason — is moralistic history, an anachronistic reading of the past according to the values of today in order to glean moral lessons. Reflective history as *critical* history is the history of history. Finally, reflective history as the *history of ideas* is the attempt to present an abstract position but to do so according to the history of different sectors of culture — art, law religion — and without a single underlying notion of their unity. Finally, philosophical history is history studied as a rational process (or unitary system) in which Spirit realizes itself (Hegel, 1956, 1-17).

It is clear, however, that though Chantepie intends to treat historical materials in his *Manual* as something beyond original history, he has precluded the possibility of treating religion according to philosophical history. Why is this so? It is because Chantepie accepts the Hegelian *disciplinary divisions*, without buying into the apparatus of the Hegelian logico-metaphysical categories. Rejecting, as he has, the specifics of the Hegelian evolutionary schema, and deferring, as he has, the philosophical analysis of the religious data, Chantepie would seem to be trying to derive a new set of categories on the basis of the data. Indeed, the divisions of his phenomenological, historical and ethnographic sections show a structuring of religious studies, in most points, different from those suggested by the Hegelian School and often dependent upon the researches of the scholars outside it. Chantepie thus seems, paradoxically, to propose a revision of the Hegelian philosophy of religion on the basis of empirical data (and scholarly consensus) while at the same time suggesting that the general Hegelian methods of analysis of religion — the metaphysical, the psychological and the historical — are correct (though empty) *super-structural* approaches. By putting the historical analyses outside of philosophical history, he places them beyond Hegelian philosophy. Because he has rejected original history and because he

has placed his historical researches outside of philosophical history, by inference the variety of history Chantepie intends would seem to be some sort of *critical* history based upon essential traits of religions.

Moreover, something very clearly un-Hegelian is at work in Chantepie's placement of phenomenology *within* the study of religion as the bridge *between* history and philosophy. He seems — from a Hegelian point of view — to have gotten the cart before the horse. Specifically, this sequence is odd. One would expect that Chantepie to first provide a philosophy of religion on which to base categories of taxonomic analysis. Indeed, this is the sequence in the Hegelian corpus.

In the *Encyclopedia*, phenomenology is found in the third part, the part dedicated to philosophical psychology (the philosophy of mind). It presupposes the formal categories of the first part — the Logic — and the application of these categories to nature (the second part). In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel makes clear his intention to include the science of religion within philosophy. As he puts it,

The science of religion is a science *within* philosophy [my italics]; it assumes, so far, the existence of other divisions of philosophical study, and it is thus a result. From the philosophical point of view we are here already in possession of a result flowing from premises previously established, which now lie behind us. We may, nevertheless, turn for aid to our ordinary consciousness, accept data assumed in a subjective way, and make a beginning from there. (Hegel, 1974, 89-90)

Chantepie ignores this Hegelian instruction. In his *Manual*, Chantepie places phenomenology, first, in religious science and uses its formal categories to shape the historical and ethnographic data. This means that Chantepie's phenomenology stands on no (obvious) philosophical base. By his own admission, the resultant phenomenologically *discovered* categories are not the product of the philosophy of religion but are derivative from the discoveries of other scholars and have been subjected to a selection process that is uniquely Chantepiean, even though some Hegelian survivals can be detected. This suggests

to me that the “shadow structure” of another notion of science is visible beneath the Hegelian accoutrements.<sup>9</sup>

For Chantepie to claim that his phenomenology was (a) historical, (b) non-philosophical and (c) concerned only with objective religious features and, at the same time, to claim that he was following the Hegelian model of science is contradictory, especially, since Hegel describes phenomenology as concerned specifically with the subjectivity of consciousness (see above, and Hegel, 1971, 151-178). Conversely, even if it is granted that Chantepie *has covertly* introduced the Hegelian philosophy as the formal principle for structuring historical material, the objectivity of his notion of phenomenology (and many of the categories he employs) are not Hegelian in origin. One might as well call him an Aristotelian because he employs the form-matter distinction! Thus the divided, piecemeal nature of the Chantepiean project is shown (see Hegel, 1975, 1970, 1971).

#### B. Oppositions between Chantepie’s notion of the science of religion and his taxonomy of religions

It is easy to specify the oppositions between the Chantepiean notion of a science of religion and his taxonomy by saying that, apart from the distinction between the general essence (of religion) and the manifestations (of religion), and apart from general allusions to Hegelian notions of development, the particular elements of comparison he selects are not Hegelian, but are derived from ethnography and history formed by other philosophies. How he can claim to maintain the Hegelian scientific structure for his enterprise, while emptying it of its concrete applicability (such as it may be) is a mystery. Because he admits a subset of the consensus view of religion has true classificatory power, this

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<sup>9</sup> One might try to save the Hegelian nature of the Chantepiean science of religion by arguing that its placement of phenomenology of religion mirrors the placement of the phenomenology of mind in the Hegelian sequence of the philosophical sciences as indicating Hegel’s intention to make a beginning from ordinary consciousness accepting its data in a subjective way. It is also clear, however, that Chantepie is aware of the peculiarity of including phenomenology in a work that he himself has said is strictly historical and not philosophical.

suggests that the views of science (tacitly) in play there are preferable. But what were these views? And why did Chantepie put phenomenology first in his science of religion?

### C. Oppositions in Tiele's notion of the science of religion

Although more sophisticated and well conceived than the Chantepiean science of religion, Tiele's science of religion manifests a host of different complications. Here, despite the evocation of similar structural features such as essence and manifestation and evolution, Tiele's discourse — *contra* Murphy — is not primarily shaped by Hegelian philosophy but by the union of naturalistic and vitalistic vocabularies and explanations. In the Tielean model of religious science, the primary opposition is between his desire to outline a naturalistic science of religion and his inability to divest himself from a vitalism that is transferred metaphorically from models of biological science to the domain of religious science.

Like Chantepie, Tiele intends to provide a description of an incipient science of human consciousness that would be as naturalistic as any of the cultural sciences. But this intention is opposed by a contravening one that eschews the materialism implied in a naturalistic approach in favor of an occult principle imported from vitalistic biology — namely the notion of an *entelechy*.<sup>10</sup> One might argue that at the time Tiele was writing, this constituted credible science. And so it did, in the sense that vitalism had an ample following. But Tiele's own intention to exclude metaphysical principles, even theoretically postulated ones, comes into conflict with this theory.

Tiele's vitalism is most clearly brought out in his list of the features of religious development and his discussion of the laws of develop-

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<sup>10</sup> The notion of an *entelechy* is Aristotelian in origin. *Entelecheia* is construed by Aristotle as the process of completion or the process of being toward completion. The soul is described by Aristotle as being the first *entelecheia* of the body, implying that the prime end of the body's functioning was its soul. The teleology of this notion is obvious. (See Aristotle, *De Anima*, 2:412b.) Tiele transfers the biological metaphor to apply to the occult motor or spirit that drives religion through the medium of human consciousness.

ment. The six features of development — (1) unity in the religion, (2) law-like change, (3) entelechy of the religious potential, (4) the value of each stage of existence, (5) sublimation of earlier stages in later and (6) preservation of genus — and the law of assimilation form a set of features paralleling the marks or notes of development that can be found in Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and, perhaps, indicating a common source in 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophies of biology. The difficulties with these principles are numerous.

First, there is a problem concerning the application of these features and laws. As is the case with Newman's marks of doctrinal development, it is not entirely clear whether these apply to a hypostatized Religion (or in Newman's case, Christian Doctrine) or whether they apply to human consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Despite Tiele's claims that his is a science of consciousness, his discussion focuses almost exclusively on the artifacts of that consciousness, to the point that, when the time comes for him to reveal exactly what the essence of Religion is, he barely gets beyond describing it as *spirituality* manifest in adoration (2:195-207). This would seem to be a very meager achievement for a science that promises so much.

Second, the metaphor he accepts for the development of religion is both essentialistic and teleological suggesting that the final perfection of Religion is contained *in potentia* in its individual forms (or religions) and by an *entelechy* will find its ultimate realization. This suggests that its developmental direction is always positive. Preferring a model of organic development inherited from Linnaeus, Tiele rejects the materialism of the Darwinian metaphor outright. Religion must exist as a fixed genus, religions working out the pre-established features

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Lash attributes the tendency to read Newman as speaking about social psychology in the *Essay* as the projection of some of his commentators, like Walgrave and Simonin. But I should like to suggest that Newman and Tiele both invite this reading, once one understands that the mediating instrumentality for both of their notions of development is human consciousness. It is because they shift back and forth between human consciousness and the *hypostatized* ideas in development that the confusion results. In both cases, however, an occult influence is postulated at work in the human mind working toward religious ends. (See N. Lash, 1975, 71, 179 n. 54.)

held potentially. He will not allow that religions may be driven *mechanically* in their development by environment to mutation, extinction and/or survival but prefers to describe the process of the evolution of religion as ultimately mysterious and vitalistic. This ultimately undercuts his desire to avoid metaphysics and to, thus, create a discipline on par with the cultural sciences.

Third, Tiele explains the distinction between essence and manifestation in light of the vitalistic teleological metaphor. Instead of constructing a description of the essence of religion nominalistically, empirically and or on the basis of formal properties discovered in the data, Tiele begins with an (apparently) realist understanding of the essence of religions as a pre-existent potential *in* religions. This he attempts to discover through the most well developed historical religion. He is able to do this only because he has already established that positive development is a function of time so that what is later is better. But this catches Tiele in a conceptual circle. How can the development of religion be gauged without having already arrived at some notion of where religion is going? And how can that be gauged without having some knowledge of the essence of religion? And, again, how can that essence be known without some notion of where religion is going? The circularity of Tiele's gauging of religious development is obvious.

#### D. Oppositions between Tiele's notion of the science of religion and his taxonomy of religions

Tiele's distinction between the morphological and the ontological divisions of his science of religion presupposes, like Chantepie's, that the historical and ethnographic data have already been "cooked" by other specialists in the field. Here, Tiele, like Chantepie, places the morphological (or taxonomic) as primary to subsequent investigations, only Tiele continues his exposition by engaging in a lengthier description of the philosophical terminus (the ontological part), a part which Chantepie places outside of the scope of his science.

By far, it is the morphological part of his *Elements* that is the most successful, but it is a success derivative from the efforts of the ethnographers and historians who preceded him; it convinces only by

the abundance of the data and the principles he employs to fill his taxonomic categories. Nothing inherent in the data suggests precisely the model of development that Tiele proposes. Here, it is a matter of the data being so abundant that numerous examples can always be appropriately placed. The ontological section, potentially the most interesting section, is also the most devoid of investigative fruitfulness, its conclusions so attenuated as to be useless for any program of research.

#### E. The hidden philosophy of science behind the Chantepiean and Tielean sciences of religion

It is my contention that the contradictory statements that both Chantepie and Tiele make about their sciences of religion originate in their intentions to square a *hidden* philosophy of science with their more apparent metaphysical presuppositions. Because historians of the study of religion have looked to the Hegelian origins of the history of religions, they have persisted in thinking that this is the single model according to which early religionists designed their sciences. I have tried to show, however, that in arrangement and intent there are some significant contradictions between the way Tiele and Chantepie frame a science of religion and the Hegelian arrangement. I would like, further, to suggest that neither Chantepie nor Tiele arrived at the structures they did unassisted, but that they were reliant upon a conception of scientific structure which was both older than Hegel's and more firmly grounded in the way scientists actually conducted empirical research in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This model, in its various incarnations, I have described at length in my book, *The Essence of Phenomenology and Its Meaning for the Scientific Study of Religion* (Ryba, 1991). It was one — if not the — persistent model for describing the arrangement of scientific investigation discussed by three Anglophone philosophers of science: John Robison (1739-1805), William Hamilton (1788-1856) and William Whewell (1794-1866). All three of these thinkers proposed divisions of science, which have broad correspondences with one another. Because two of them were also natural scientists — Robison was a professor of nat-

ural philosophy at Edinburgh and Whewell a professor of mineralogy at Trinity College Cambridge — these schemas were presumably attempts to organize the actual scientific practice of the day.

For Robison, science consisted of phenomenology, taxonomy and etiology; for Hamilton it was phenomenology, nomology and ontology; and for Whewell it was a division into phenomenology, taxonomy, etiology and theory (Robison, 1778, 586-587; Hamilton, 1851, 1:94-95, 1:121-122; Whewell, 1967, 1:642-643; Ryba, 1991, 43-54, 73-100, 101-140). Each of these thinkers believed that science should proceed from description, to classification according to the *formal* properties of objects, to the discovery of law-like regularities and, finally, to the construction of grand theories having broad predictive power.

I think that something like this schema of scientific discovery was assumed by Chantepie and Tiele to reflect natural-scientific practice and thus became a *sine qua non* for the construction of a science of religion, but because they also clung to the more obvious Hegelian speculative notions their formulations were riven with oppositions. The primary evidence for such a “shadow” philosophy of science lies in the non-Hegelian sequence of disciplines in Chantepie’s science of religion: Phenomenology-Ethnography-History. But it is also present in his drive to classify the raw materials of history and ethnography, *objectively*, according to taxonomic principles of non-Hegelian origin. Certainly, he was influenced by the comprehensiveness of the Hegelian system, and by its vocabulary and structural principles, but his approach was also pitched forward toward an arrangement more solidly based upon the empirical sciences.

In the case of Tiele, the terms “morphology” and “ontology” — and their sequence — more closely mirror the English structuring of science. He is closer to accepting a naturalistic science of religion on analogy with the cultural sciences, but the sterility of his proposed science is a result of his inability to turn it over to a sequence of empirical methods that would not presuppose occult principles.

*Conclusion*

Facing the possibility of a naturalistic approach to the science of religion — one based upon natural-scientific models — neither Chantepie nor Tiele could abandon certain metaphysical safeguards. For both Chantepie and Tiele these elements were bound up with their valorization of Religion and their means for its protection. At the same time, they were aware that a science of religion that promised scientific results was not impossible. They opted to have it both ways — to propose a science of religion but to protect their dear metaphysical assumptions. The result of this incapacity was the formulation of syncretistic sciences of religion marking midpoints on the arc from theology to a naturalistic religious science. Even today, such syncretism continues in the study of religion.

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## IN DEFENSE OF THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

ROBERT A. SEGAL

### *Summary*

While in some disciplines the comparative method is used unhesitatingly, in others it is spurned. In the field of religious studies, the method has long been rejected, and that rejection far antedates the anti-comparativist stance of postmodernism. This article identifies the main objections commonly lodged against the method and attempts to refute them all — as mischaracterizations either of the method or of the quest for knowledge itself. The article then considers the use of the method by the two figures in religious studies still singled out as the most egregious practitioners of it: James Frazer and William Robertson Smith. In actuality, not even they turn out to be guilty of any of the objections lodged against the method. At the same time they turn out to employ the method in contrary ways. Frazer uses the method to show the similarities among religions; Smith uses it as much to show the differences. The contrasting use of the same method by its most famous practitioners shows that the method is not merely malleable but indispensable to all scholars of religion — those seeking the particularities of individual religions no less than those seeking the universals of religion.

### *Opposition to the Comparative Method*

In the natural sciences and in many of the social sciences, such as sociology and economics, the comparative method has traditionally been lauded as central to the quest for knowledge. By contrast, in cultural anthropology, religious studies, and certain other fields, the method has commonly been dismissed as archaic, even quaint, though of course there continue to be grand comparativists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology and Mircea Eliade in religious studies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Among the many expressions, surveys, and assessments of the comparative method in various fields see Edward B. Tylor, "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions; applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (1888): 245-72; A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The

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Comparative Method in Social Anthropology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 81 (1951): 15-22; Oscar Lewis, "Comparisons in Cultural Anthropology," *Yearbook of Anthropology* 1 (1955): 259-92; George Peter Murdock, "Anthropology as a Comparative Method," *Behavioral Science* 2 (1957): 249-54; Melford E. Spiro, *Oedipus in the Trobriands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Ladislav Holy, ed., *Comparative Anthropology* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987); Donald E. Brown, *Human Universals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); "The Comparative Method in Folklore" (Special Double Issue), *Journal of Folklore Research* 23 (1986): 77-250; L.T. Hobhouse, G.C. Wheeler, and M. Ginsberg, *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Humanities Press, 1965 [1915]); Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960); Reinhard Bendix, "Concepts and Generalizations in Comparative Sociological Studies," *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963): 532-39; Robert M. Marsh, "The Bearing of Comparative Analysis on Sociological Theory," *Social Forces* 43 (1964): 188-96; Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 174-97; Malcolm Williams, "Interpretivism and Generalisation," *Sociology* 34 (2000): 209-24; Sigmund Neumann, "Comparative Politics: A Half-Century Appraisal," *Journal of Politics* 19 (1957): 369-90; Harry Eckstein and David E. Apter, eds., *Comparative Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1963); Harold D. Lasswell, "The Future of the Comparative Method," *Comparative Politics* 1 (1968): 3-18; Samuel H. Beer, "The Comparative Method and the Study of British Politics," *Comparative Politics* 1 (1968): 19-36; Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* 65 (1971): 682-93; John W. Whiting, "The Cross-Cultural Method," in Gardner Lindzey, ed., *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954), I, 523-31; Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970); Henry M. Hoenigswald, "On the History of the Comparative Method," *Anthropological Linguistics* 5 (1963): 1-11; Bert F. Hoselitz, "On Comparative History," *World Politics* 2 (1957): 267-79; Louis Gottschalk, ed., *Generalization in the Writing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); "Particularism" (Special Issue), *Criticism* 32 (1990): 275-400; Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13; William F. Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, and Early Biblical Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo, and John B. White, eds., *Scripture in Context* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chs. 2, 3; Fitz John Porter Poole, "Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 411-57.

Writing in 1954, anthropologist Erwin Ackerknecht declared that "Within a hundred years the comparative method has in anthropology, especially in cultural anthropology, descended from a dominant position to a point where it is in general either not practiced or even condemned explicitly."<sup>2</sup> Opposition to the comparative method in anthropology may go back to Bronislaw Malinowski, who at once instilled the necessity of intensive fieldwork in a single culture and analyzed cultural phenomena in terms of their function within a culture. Doubtless specialization in one, two, or at most three cultures not only discourages anthropologists from studying other cultures but also encourages them to stress the distinctiveness of their own natives. To quote Melford Spiro, himself a stern opponent of particularism in anthropology,

[T]he distinctive anthropological approach, the source of its strength and weakness alike, is a contextual one. Social phenomena can only be understood, according to this methodological stance, in their historical uniqueness, that is, as the products of culturally parochial forms, structures, and processes. Similarly, the goal of such studies is to explain why the people under investigation differ from other peoples with respect to the subject of one's inquiry, rather than to discover a set of principles that might explain the range of phenomena of which it is only one variant.<sup>3</sup>

Yet for all the anthropological attention to the particular, many of the most acclaimed twentieth-century anthropologists, not least Malinowski himself, are acclaimed as much for their generalizations about

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<sup>2</sup> Erwin H. Ackerknecht, "On the Comparative Method in Anthropology," in *Method and Perspective in Anthropology*, ed. Robert F. Spencer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), 117.

<sup>3</sup> Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 [1970]), xv. Fred Eggan puts the point in practical terms: "If each anthropologist follows the Malinowskian tradition of specializing in one, or two, or three societies and spends his lifetime in writing about them, what happens to comparative studies?" ("Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison," *American Anthropologist* 56 [1954]: 754).

“primitive man” or humanity per se as for their specialized ethnographies.<sup>4</sup>

In religious studies, opposition to the comparative method likely stems from the same concern with the distinctiveness of each religion. In biblical studies, for example, the emphasis has long been on the uniqueness of Israel vis-à-vis its ancient Near Eastern neighbors.<sup>5</sup> Titles like *The Old Testament against Its Environment* say it all. Going beyond their anthropological counterparts, biblicists strive to preserve not merely the distinctiveness but the outright superiority of their natives,<sup>6</sup> who, in further contrast to the natives of anthropologists, share the religion of the biblicists themselves. The comparative method is rejected because it not merely fails to differentiate religions but also levels them.

The most celebrated contemporary opponent of the comparative method throughout the humanities and the social sciences has been the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, whose opposition is tied to his broader opposition to an *explanatory* approach to culture. In his continual advocacy of, instead, an *interpretive* approach to culture, Geertz means a variety of things, but one thing he means is the primacy of the particular over the general. Geertz opposes generalizations on multiple grounds. They invariably prove inaccurate or tendentious. They are somehow inseparable from the particulars that yield them and, when separated, turn out to be banal or empty: “Theoretical formulations [i.e., generalizations] hover so low over the [particularistic] interpreta-

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<sup>4</sup> See Bronislaw Malinowski, “Magic, Science and Religion” (1925) and “Myth in Primitive Psychology” (1926), both reprinted in his *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1948), 1-71 and 72-124; and more boldly yet, “A Scientific Theory of Culture,” in his *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 3-144.

<sup>5</sup> For overviews of this position see Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), esp. 44-50; Robert A. Oden, Jr., *The Bible Without Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000 [1987]), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Writes Oden of a representative work in biblical studies: “As before, we note that ‘uniqueness’ here implies not just difference; rather, . . . uniqueness implies superiority. . .” (158).

tions they govern that they don't make much sense or hold much interest apart from them. . . . [S]tated independently of their [particularistic] applications, they seem either commonplace or vacant."<sup>7</sup>

Above all, generalizations miss the distinctiveness of the particulars they amass:

Within the bloated categories of regime description, Feudalism or Colonialism, Late Capitalism or The World System, Neo-Monarchy or Parliamentary Militarism, there is a resident suchness, deep Moroccanity, inner Indonesianness, struggling to get out. Such a conception of things is usually called nationalism. That is certainly not wrong, but, another bloated category, grouping the ungroupable and blurring distinctions internally felt, it is less definite than it seems. Every quiddity has its own form of suchness, and no one who comes to Morocco or Indonesia to find out what goes on there is likely to confuse them with each other or to be satisfied with elevated banalities about common humanity or a universal need for self-expression.<sup>8</sup>

It is in the particular and not in the general that the significance of any cultural phenomenon lies:

[T]he notion that the essence of what it means to be human is most clearly revealed in those features of human culture that are universal rather than in those that are distinctive to this people or that is a prejudice we are not necessarily obliged to share. Is it in grasping such general facts — that man has everywhere some sort of "religion" — or in grasping the richness of this religious phenomenon or that — Balinese trance or Indian ritualism, Aztec human sacrifice or Zuni rain-dancing — that we grasp him? Is the fact that "marriage" is universal (if it is) as penetrating a comment on what we are as the facts concerning Himalayan polyandry, or those fantastic Australian marriage rules, or the elaborate bride-price systems of Bantu Africa?<sup>9</sup>

What the proper place of generalization is, Geertz never makes clear. At his most exasperated, he rejects generalizations altogether, even though he himself employs them in the process of contrasting one case of *religion* or of *marriage* to another. More often, he limits

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<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Geertz, *After the Fact* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>9</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 43.

generalizations to identifying the categories under which particulars fall. Still other times, he allows them to provide the “cause” but not the “meaning” of particulars. What counts is that his opposition to generalizations is his opposition to the comparative method. Geertz’s objections have not gone uncontested, but the rebuttal — by, notably, Ernest Gellner on one side of the Atlantic and Melford Spiro on the other<sup>10</sup> — has clearly not won the day.

Moreover, Geertz’s own somewhat tempered stance toward comparison<sup>11</sup> has been superseded by the uncompromising repudiation of the method by postmodernists, themselves partly inspired by him. Postmodernism has been especially influential in anthropology, preoccupied as the discipline is with the “the other,” but it has spread to all of the social sciences, including fields traditionally committed to the comparative method like sociology and economics. Certainly religious studies has been smitten with it. In light of the postmodernist focus on the unique, the eccentric, the exotic, the marginal, the neglected, and the excluded, the “modernist” concern with the general is anathema. As Pauline Rosenau describes the postmodernist position,

The skeptical post-modernists’ reservations about the possibility of generalizing and their emphasis on difference . . . form the basis of rejecting the comparative method. If, as they conclude, everything is unique, then the comparative method is invalid in its attempts to search for and explain similarities and [even]

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<sup>10</sup> See Ernest Gellner, “The Stakes in Anthropology,” *American Scholar* 57 (1988): 17-30; Melford Spiro, “Cultural Relativism and the Future of Anthropology,” *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (1986): 259-86.

<sup>11</sup> The same Geertz who spurns the search for the essence of human nature in the universal rather than the particular also, if less typically, seeks a middle ground, “one in which culture, and the variability of culture, would be taken into account rather than written off as caprice and prejudice, and yet, at the same time, one in which the governing principle of the field, ‘the basic unity of mankind,’ would not be turned into an empty phrase” (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 36). On Geertz’s fluctuating position see my “Interpreting and Explaining Religion: Geertz and Durkheim,” *Soundings* 71 (1988): 29-52 (rpt. in my *Explaining and Interpreting Religion* [New York: Peter Lang, 1992], esp. 93-95).

differences while holding certain dimensions constant (assuming a degree of sameness in other variables).<sup>12</sup>

*Frazer and Smith as the Arch-Comparativists*

Within religious studies as well as within anthropology, the epitome of the comparative method is still taken to be James Frazer and, to a lesser extent, William Robertson Smith. By no coincidence, it is they and not more recent figures who are still singled out as the most egregious comparativists. No contemporaries would dare to practice the method in so uninhibited a form. The work of Frazer and Smith is deemed outdated less because of the views of religion and culture they espouse and more because of the way they reached them: by the comparative method.

In *The Savage in Judaism*, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz sums up the standard criticism of Frazer and Smith:

Those who used "the comparative method" compared anything and everything in their expectation of finding a universal evolutionary scheme in the development of religion, culture, and mind. . . . Primitive societies provided evidence of the stages through which more advanced cultures had already moved. Since such interpreters were "armchair anthropologists" and did not examine a given cultural trait "in context," their interpretations were ludicrous from the perspective of persons who were more familiar with the societies in question. . . . For interpreters of Israelite religion, these abuses were particularly evident in the works of William Robertson Smith and James G. Frazer, the most important figures to use the comparative method to understand Israelite religion. . . . Instead of ranging far and wide over the religions of the world, biblical scholars reacted against the comparative method by insisting on understanding Israelite religion against the backdrop of other ancient Near Eastern religions. As Sayce puts it in his review of Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, "I must enter a protest against the assumption that what holds good of Kaffirs or Australians held good also of the primitive Semite." In their hands, the comparative method demonstrated provocative similarities between

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<sup>12</sup> Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 105-6.

the religions of savages and Israelites and, consequently, threatened to undermine the privileged status of the latter.<sup>13</sup>

Eilberg-Schwartz himself proceeds to *defend* the comparative method, but only a tamer variety of it. He takes for granted that Frazer and Smith carry the method too far.

### *The Comparative Method and Evolution*

As Eilberg-Schwartz's statement makes clear, part of the objection to the comparative method has been its longstanding link to evolution, which has conventionally been castigated no less vigorously than the method.<sup>14</sup> Whether evolution deserves opprobrium is not the issue here, which is whether the method is separable from evolution. Indisputably, Frazer and Smith themselves link the method to evolution. They seek not only a thematic, or conceptual, parallel between "primitive" and Israelite religion but also a causal one: Israelite religion not simply is like primitive religion but also grows — evolves — out of it. Without primitive religion, there would be no Israelite religion.

Whatever connection Frazer and Smith draw between the comparative method and evolution, the comparative method is in fact distinct from evolution. The evolution of Y out of X requires that Y not only be like X but also postdate X and be in physical proximity to X. By contrast, the comparative method requires only that Y be like X. No temporal or spatial linkage is required. In fact, the worldwide comparisons that especially Frazer provides assume no temporal or spatial linkage. Frazer claims not that Israelite religion emerged from contact

<sup>13</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> While writing back in 1953, David Bidney captures what may still be the fear of the comparative method bred by its association with evolution: "So timid and wary has the modern anthropologist become, lest he commit the fallacies of the evolutionary ethnologist of the nineteenth century, that the very thought of 'the comparative method' strikes him with terror. Thus, comparative studies are viewed as unscientific adventures reminiscent of an outmoded era in cultural anthropology" (*Theoretical Anthropology* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1953], 427). See also Ackerknecht, 117, 123-24.

with primitive primitive peoples but that Israel itself underwent an evolution from a primitive state to a more advanced one. He uses primitive cases to reconstruct the earlier state, not to link Israelites to primitives living around the world. He attributes evolution to independent invention by each culture rather than to cross-cultural influence. The comparative method in itself is an attempt simply to find similarities, not to account for them. The parallels it finds are thematic, not necessarily causal.<sup>15</sup> The discovery of parallels demands an explanation but does not itself provide one.

The objection to evolution is that it presumes not only to account for the phenomena it parallels but also to evaluate them. What comes earliest is lowliest; what comes latest is highest. But, again, the comparative method seeks only to find parallels, not to rank them. Any ranking goes beyond the method. Therefore the antidote to the method is not relativism, as if the method were committed to absolutism. The method is as compatible with relativism as with absolutism.<sup>16</sup> It is a logical fallacy — the naturalistic fallacy — to jump from the *fact* of either diversity or uniformity, which is all that the method determines, to the *norm* of it. Universalists who damn particularists for their relativism are as guilty of the fallacy as particularists who derive relativism from particularism.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> At the same time causal connections are sometimes established on the basis of thematic similarities. Thus the extent of the influence of mystery religions on early Christianity is often debated thematically: see, for example, Bruce M. Metzger, "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 48 (1955): 1-20. The Synoptic Problem is an even grander case in point.

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, relativism as much as absolutism depends on the method to provide the common standard against which departures are measured. Knowing how one religion differs from another comes only from knowing how one religion is not similar to another, and that knowledge presupposes a common criterion such as the number of gods in a religion. Total relativism would be incommensurable.

<sup>17</sup> For example, both Gellner and Spiro equate Geertz's particularism with relativism. Geertz himself seeks to sever particularism from at least moral relativism: see his "Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1984): 263-78. Melville J.

*Criticisms of the Comparative Method*

Apart from the linkage to evolution,<sup>18</sup> the comparative method has been damned on many grounds:

- (1) for finding only similarities among phenomena and ignoring differences
- (2) for confusing similarity with identity
- (3) for generalizing too broadly
- (4) for generalizing prematurely
- (5) for taking phenomena out of context
- (6) for generalizing at all.

These criticisms are in fact misconceptions, either about the method or about knowledge itself. Moreover, neither Frazer nor Smith abuses the method in any of these ways. I will take these issues in turn.

First, to compare phenomena is merely to match them up. It is scarcely to dictate what will be found. It is therefore scarcely to dictate finding only similarities.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, to compare phenomena is

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Herskovits' classic association of particularism with moral relativism rests on his association of moral with both conceptual and perceptual relativism, so that for him no one harbors a neutral cognitive vantage point from which to judge differences: "Those who make up a society have no more difficulty in defining reality than they have in defining good conduct and bad. But this is within a society. Cultural relativism developed because the facts of differences in these concepts of reality or in moral systems, plus our knowledge of the mechanisms of cultural learning, forced the realization of the problem of finding valid cross-cultural norms. In every case where criteria to evaluate the ways of different peoples have been proposed, in no matter what aspect of culture, the question has at once posed itself: 'Whose standards?' The force of the enculturative experience channels all judgments" (*Cultural Relativism*, ed. Frances Herskovits [New York: Vintage Books, 1973], 56). See also his *Man and His Works* (New York: Knopf, 1948), esp. 64.

<sup>18</sup> To be sure, not all of those criticized for their comparativism are evolutionists or, if they are, are criticized for their evolutionary views as well. For example, C.G. Jung is continually attacked, fairly or not, for his subsumption of particulars under universal archetypes, not for his psychological variety of evolution.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, Jonathan Z. Smith faults the traditional comparison of earliest Christianity with Hellenistic religions exactly for finding only *differences* (*Drudgery Divine* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990]).

*necessarily* to find differences as well as similarities. Even if one were *seeking* only similarities, one would know that one had found them all only at the point at which no further differences could be converted into similarities. Consequently, one can as readily use the comparative method to find differences as use it to find similarities. Geertz himself compares Indonesia with Morocco to illuminate the differences between them:

The dissimilarities of Morocco and Indonesia do not separate them into absolute types, the sociological equivalent of natural kinds; they reflect back and forth upon one another, mutually framing, reciprocally clarifying. Or so they seem to do for me. I learned more about Indonesia when, shaken by the disturbances of the mid-sixties, I decided it the better part of valor to work in Morocco, than I would have had I gone back then directly to Indonesia. And I learned more about Morocco when, after things had settled down again in the seventies, I returned, not without trepidation, to Indonesia, than I would have by confining myself, as beginning to find my feet in another civilization, I was tempted to do, thenceforth to North Africa.<sup>20</sup>

The comparative method is itself neutral. It is a tool, to be used by either particularists or universalists.<sup>21</sup>

Second, it is a logical truism that any two entities, however much alike, are still distinct. Therefore the comparison of phenomena can never yield identity, only similarity. Even to seek only similarities is not to eliminate differences. Conversely, to seek only differences — a

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<sup>20</sup> Geertz, *After the Fact*, 28. See also Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> Advocates in religious studies of what is called the “new comparativism” not only mischaracterize the “old comparativism” as seeking only similarities — a hundred years ago Smith used the comparative method to discover differences as well as similarities — but also dogmatically insist that comparisons seek both differences and similarities: “A central purpose of comparison should be to *expose* the diversity of the variant objects it compares” (William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 [1996]: 9). Saying that the comparative method can be used to find either differences or similarities or even both is not saying that it must be used to find both — as if the quest for either alone were improper. For a milder statement of the necessity of attending to both differences and similarities see Paden, *Religious Worlds* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), esp. 162.

typically defensive reaction by those fearful of comparison — is not to eradicate similarities. The options are neither wholesale identity nor total uniqueness but only further similarities or further differences.<sup>22</sup>

Those who seek similarities not only cannot but do not deny differences. They deny the *importance* of differences. To counter vaunted similarities with sheer differences is, then, to miss the point. To argue from the *fact* of differences, which are never denied, to the *importance* of them is to beg the question: why *are* differences more significant than similarities? The argument in favor of similarities — that similarities are weightier than differences — may be questioning-begging, but so is the argument in favor of differences — that differences are deeper than similarities. Geertz's asking whether the universality of marriage is "as penetrating a comment on what we are as the facts concerning Himalayan polyandry, or those fantastic Australian marriage rules, or the elaborate bride-price systems of Bantu Africa" is a less rhetorical question than he realizes. Whether one prefers similarities or differences may be a matter of temperament.<sup>23</sup> In any case the comparative method itself establishes only the fact, not the importance, of either similarities or differences. Again, the method does not rank what it finds.

Third, any two phenomena are comparable. Comparisons are useful or useless, not right or wrong, not too broad or too narrow. It is fallacious to say, for example, that earliest Christianity is comparable only with other religions of late antiquity and not with primitive religions. (The premise that comparison yields only similarities is

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<sup>22</sup> See J.Z. Smith, 47.

<sup>23</sup> As Margaret T. Hodgen puts it, "For there are two types of mind among scholars. There are those who in their efforts to understand the world submit to the methodological principle of specification or particularization. When drawn into making comparisons, they resist assertions of likeness, similarity, analogy, unity. The phenomenon of differentness in culture prevails against even the most persuasive arguments from likeness. The other type adheres to the principle of homogeneity; to the fruitfulness in explanation of arguing from the similar, the corresponding, the parallel, or the identical" (*Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964], 295).

also fallacious.) The *aim* of a comparison determines the range. If one wants to understand why people X practice animal sacrifice, a comparison with a people who do not practice it would ordinarily, though not invariably, be too broad. But a comparison with any other people who practice it would likely not be.

Fourth, comparisons are always considered provisional, not conclusive. Comparisons are subject to correction or abandonment, as new facts arise. The failure of existing generalizations is scarcely an argument against generalizations *per se*. Moreover, one will never be able to identify all the cases of animal sacrifice or all the information about all of those cases. How would one even know if one had? It is a rudimentary fallacy of explanation — the so-called Baconian, or inductivist, fallacy — to oppose drawing conclusions until all the knowable facts are “in.” Because generalizations are recognized as tentative, the comparative method does not generalize prematurely. If it does, then even noncomparativist conclusions about people X alone are also premature, for here, too, all the knowable facts are never “in.” And the facts do not include causes, which are inferred.

Fifth, proper comparisons not only do not but cannot take phenomena out of their contexts. To be able to compare the offering of animal sacrifices by people X with the offering of the same by people Y, one had better be sure that both peoples do indeed kill animals and offer them to their gods to win their gods’ favor. From where but the context can this information be secured? To quote Frazer, himself routinely castigated by particularists for supposedly tearing cases out of context:

The [anthropological] method is neither more nor less than induction . . . And the first condition of a sound induction is exact observation. What we want, therefore, in this branch of science is, first and foremost, full, true, and precise accounts of savage and barbarous peoples based on personal observation. Such accounts are best given by men who have lived for many years among the peoples, have won their confidence, and can converse with them familiarly in their native language. . . .<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James George Frazer, “The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology,” in his *Garnered Sheaves* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 244.

So worried is Frazer that comparison prior to observation will contaminate the observation that he insists that “every observer of a savage or barbarous people should describe it as if no other people existed on the face of the earth” — that is, in its particularity. Frazer permits the observer to be a comparativist as well, but only if the activities are kept separate: “the mixture of the two is, if not absolutely fatal, at least a great impediment to the utility of both.”<sup>25</sup> Far, then, from comparing phenomena severed from their contexts, the comparative method compares phenomena *in* their contexts.

What might seem to be taking phenomena out of context is in fact mere selectiveness. Insofar as the object of comparison is animal sacrifices, much else about the peoples compared will properly be ignored as irrelevant. Even an analysis of the animal sacrifices of people X alone will ignore many aspects of their lives. The difference between the selectiveness of a generalist and that of a particularist is only one of degree. The broader the scale of a comparison, the more selective the elements compared will be — this in order to encompass all cases. If one is comparing animal sacrifices worldwide, one will disregard the differences between one form of animal sacrifice and another. But to select only certain common elements from all the cases is not to ignore the context, which is still indispensable for determining the existence of animal sacrifice in each case.

Sixth and most important, comparison is not merely permissible but indispensable. To understand any phenomenon, however specific, is to identify it and to account for it. To identify something is to place it in a category, and to account for it is to account for the category of which it is a member. Both procedures are thus inescapably comparativist.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>26</sup> On the connection between categorization and explanation see Ernst Mayr and Peter D. Ashlock, *Principles of Systematic Zoology*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991 [1st ed. 1969]) 124-25; Carl G. Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation And Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 453-57. A most useful illustration of the connection between the two is that of medical diagnosis, which is cited by not only Hempel and others but also Geertz, who, however, ironically invokes it as a would-be illustration of sheer categorization

Suppose one wants to know why people X — just people X — practice animal sacrifice, and suppose one ascertains from people X that they offer animal sacrifices to their gods because they believe that sacrifices will win their gods' favor. One then makes the claim that people X offer animal sacrifices for this reason. But presupposed in the claim that people X offer animal sacrifices because they believe that they will thereby win their gods' favor is the claim that other peoples who believe that their gods' favor can be won through animal sacrifices will also offer them. Otherwise what explains why people X offer them? To propose the belief as a sufficient explanation of people X's offering animal sacrifices is to presuppose a generalization, however obvious, about many peoples: that they are prepared to give up valuable possessions to their gods because they believe that it pays to do so. This generalization about the practical, vested motivation of other peoples alone accounts for the behavior of people X in particular.<sup>27</sup>

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— one of the ways he tries to distinguish interpretation from explanation: see *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 26-27. On the separation of categorization from explanation see W.H. Walsh, "The Intelligibility of History," *Philosophy* 17 (1942): 128-43; *An Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, rev. ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1958 [1st ed. 1951]), 23-24, 59-64; "Colligatory Concepts in History," in *Studies in the Nature and Teaching of History*, eds. W.H. Burston and D. Thompson (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), 65-84. Following Walsh, see William H. Dray, "'Explaining What' in History," in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: Free Press, 1959), 403-8; "Colligation Under Appropriate Conditions," in *Substance and Form in History*, eds. Louis Pompa and W.H. Dray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), 156-70. Where for Walsh categorization must still be accompanied by explanation to provide a complete historical analysis, for the more radical Dray categorization is one distinct form of historical analysis and explanation — causal explanation — another. See also Marvin Levich, review essay of Sidney Hook, ed., *Philosophy and History, History and Theory* 4 (1965): 339-41. Independently of Geertz, Levich prefers the by-now overworked term "interpretation" for the foil to explanation.

<sup>27</sup> The *locus classicus* of this view of explanation is Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1st English ed. (New York: Basic Books; London: Hutchinson, 1959), sec. 12.

Take the case of the French Revolution. Suppose one claims, on the basis of an intensive study of French peasants, that the peasants revolted because the price of bread kept rising. Built into this claim, even if offered only about the French case, is the generalized claim that whenever the price of bread rises, people will revolt. Otherwise what explains why the French revolted? Because they were French? That answer is circular. Because they were hungry? But then one is explaining the French Revolution in particular by appeal to the generalization, however self-evident, that when people are hungry enough, they will revolt. If one replies that by no means all peoples revolt when the price of bread or of food generally rises, then the purported explanation of the French case is inadequate, for something more than the rising price of bread must have been the cause in that case if the rising price is not sufficient to spur revolt every time. Whatever else is added — hatred of the monarchy, despair over the prospect of reform, agitation by the press — constitutes a sufficient explanation of the French Revolution only if it also constitutes a sufficient explanation of every other revolution. If these same circumstances do not produce revolution every time, then they inadequate account for revolution any time.

Apply this argument to animal sacrifice. Suppose, again, one claims, on the basis of a meticulous study of people X, that they sacrifice animals to their gods because they believe that they will thereby win their gods' favor. Built into this claim about people X in themselves is the generalization that whenever people believe they can win their gods' favor by animal sacrifices, they will do so. If one replies that not all peoples who believe that their gods' favor can be won by animal sacrifice proceed to practice it, then the explanation is inadequate even for people X. For something else must be at work to account for why people X proceed with the sacrifices when other peoples who share the belief in the efficacy of animal sacrifice do not. What must be added can range from, say, the desperation of people X to win their gods' favor to the inexpensiveness of their sacrifices. Whatever else suffices

to account for the case of people X does so only if it also suffices to account for the sacrifices of other peoples in the same circumstances.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Debates over the explanation of events in history are not over the uniqueness of events but over the necessity of generalizations to account for them. See the debate between the universalist Carl Hempel and the particularist William Dray: Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy* 39 (1942): 35-48; "Rational Action," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 35 (1962): 5-23; "Explanation in Science and in History," in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Robert G. Colodny (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 9-33; "Reasons and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation," in *Philosophy and History*, ed. Sidney Hook, Fifth Annual New York University Institute of Philosophy (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 143-63; *Aspects of Scientific Explanation And Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, esp. 447-87; William H. Dray, "Explanatory Narrative in History," *Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1954): 15-27; *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); "'Explaining What' in History"; "The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered," in *Philosophy and History*, ed. Hook, 105-35; "Singular Hypotheticals and Historical Explanation," in *Sociological Theory*, ed. Llewellyn Gross (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 181-203; *Philosophy of History*, 2nd ed., Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1993 [1st ed. 1964]), ch. 1. See also, pro-generalization, Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); Ernest Nagel, "Some Issues in the Logic of Historical Analysis," *Scientific Monthly* 74 (1952): 162-69; *The Structure of Science* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961), 547-92; May Brodbeck, "Explanation, Prediction, and 'Imperfect' Knowledge," in *Scientific Explanation, Space, and Time*, eds. Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, III (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 231-72; Karl R. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964 [1st ed. 1957; 3rd ed. 1961]), sec. 30; *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966 [1st ed. 1944]), II, ch. 25, sec. 2; W.W. Bartley III, "Achilles, the Tortoise, and Explanation in Science and History," *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 13 (1962): 15-33; Carey B. Joynt and Nicholas Rescher, "The Problem of Uniqueness in History," *History and Theory* 1 (1961): 150-62; con-generalization, Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), esp. 154, 160-61, 166-68; Alan Donagan, "Explanation in History," *Mind* 66 (1957): 145-64; "Historical Explanation: the Popper-Hempel Theory Reconsidered," *History and Theory* 4 (1964): 3-26.

Several anticipated objections can readily be met. It might be argued that other peoples offer animal sacrifices for different reasons. Suppose a study of people Y reveals that they offer animal sacrifices out of duty rather than out of a calculated payoff. But that discovery is no argument against the proposed explanation for people X, for the claim made about them is intended to provide only a sufficient, not a necessary, explanation. The claim is not that the *only* reason for animal sacrifice is the calculation that it pays but that *whenever* the calculation exists, there will be animal sacrifices. Most explanations of human behavior and even of physical events are intended to be at best merely sufficient, not necessary, ones.<sup>29</sup> Ordinarily, there are too many possible causes of the same behavior to be able to stipulate necessary ones. People may revolt for many reasons. They need not be famished to do so.<sup>30</sup>

Conversely, it might be argued that even would-be sufficient generalizations invariably fail to suffice. Suppose a study of people Z discloses that they, like people X, believe that animal sacrifices will win their gods' favor, are desperate to gain that favor, and can readily afford the sacrifices. Yet suppose that even so, they, in contrast to people X, do not make animal sacrifices. Obviously, the explanation of people X thereby proves insufficient and must be supplemented to account for their proceeding to make sacrifices. But suppose, further, that no matter how many additions are made, the explanation still fails to account for the difference between people X's behavior and people Z's. The conclusion to be drawn is not that the reasons for people X's behavior are mysterious but that the reasons are so numerous or so complex that no other people will likely share them all. Most explanations of

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<sup>29</sup> To be sure, some explanations of human behavior claim to be only necessary. The reason that Emile Durkheim's sociology of religion is so much more extreme than Max Weber's is that Durkheim claims to be providing sufficient as well as necessary causes of religion where Weber claims to be providing only necessary ones.

<sup>30</sup> Franz Boas' objection to the comparative method is exactly that, according to him, it presumes to provide necessary as well as sufficient causes. Boas insists that the same effects often stem from different causes, so that no one cause is necessary. See "The Limitations of the Comparative Method," *Science*, n.s., 4 (1896): 901-8 (rpt. Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* [New York: Macmillan, 1940], 270-80).

human behavior and even of physical events are intended as less than sufficient ones.<sup>31</sup> Most often, they are offered as merely probabilistic.<sup>32</sup> The claim is that whenever the conditions named occur, the behavior will likely, not inevitably, occur, and the degree of likelihood can even be less than 50%.<sup>33</sup> No matter how famished people are, not all and maybe not even most will revolt.

Finally, it might be argued that even necessary and sufficient generalizations are irrelevant because the behavior itself is unique. Suppose that only people X offer animal sacrifices. Or suppose that only people X offer sacrifices of a particular animal, one found only in their locale. But the uniqueness of their case is a mere historical contingency. The explanation offered of their unique case would still have to hold, even if as a less than sufficient explanation, for any other people in the same

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<sup>31</sup> As Ernest Nagel writes, "The search for explanations is directed to the ideal of ascertaining the necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of phenomena. This ideal is rarely achieved, however, and even in the best-developed natural sciences it is often an open question whether the conditions mentioned in an explanation are indeed sufficient" ("Some Issues in the Logic of Historical Analysis," 167).

<sup>32</sup> As Wesley C. Salmon writes of modern physics, "Some first-rate physicists are presently working to find a deterministic theory to replace the current quantum mechanics, one by which it will be possible to explain what now seems irreducibly statistical by means of 'hidden variables' that cannot occur in the present theory. No one can say for sure whether they will succeed; any new theory, deterministic or indeterministic, has to stand the test of experiment. The current quantum theory does show, however, that the world *may* be fundamentally and irremediably indeterministic, for according to the best currently available knowledge, it is" ("Determinism and Indeterminism in Modern Science," in *Reason and Responsibility*, ed. Joel Fineberg, 2nd ed. [Belmont, CA: Dickenson, 1971], 321).

<sup>33</sup> Salmon cites a familiar example: "[I]f a person contracts syphilis, and it goes through the primary, secondary, and latent stages without treatment with penicillin, he may develop paresis. This is one form of tertiary syphilis, but only a small percentage of those who have untreated latent syphilis become paretic. At the same time, the only people who develop paresis are victims of syphilis. If an individual develops paresis, we offer as an explanation the fact that he had untreated latent syphilis, even though the probability of a latent untreated syphilitic becoming paretic is considerably less than half. There are no known characteristics by means of which to predict which cases will develop paresis and which will not" (*ibid.*, 326).

circumstances who also offered animal sacrifices, of any kind or of a particular kind. The comparative method is often confused with the assumption of universals — as if it stands committed to similarities not merely across cultures but across *all* cultures. In actuality, the method requires the *search* for multiple instances of a phenomenon but allows for the *discovery* of even just one. Still, unless the explanation given of people X would apply to any other people in kindred conditions who did offer these sacrifices, the explanation fails to explain even the sole case to date of people X.

In short, the way to understand people X is not merely by myopically studying them more and more. It is also by studying other peoples as well. One cannot, in particularistic fashion, ignore other peoples and focus only on people X. One cannot say blithely that one cares only about people X or, like Geertz, that the differences between people X and other peoples are more profound than the similarities. Even if one is interested only in the particular, similarities are indispensable, both in categorizing, for example, the French Revolution as a revolution and in accounting for it. Geertz himself employs similarities even in the effort to articulate the distinctiveness of the cultures he has studied.<sup>34</sup>

The comparative method amounts to more than the juxtaposition of phenomena. It means the identification of a common category for those phenomena. That identification spurs the application or the discovery of a common explanation of that category. While the comparative method can be used to find differences as well as similarities, the method itself seeks similarities and finds differences only where the similarities cease.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Geertz's use of such categories as culture, ethos, world view, ritual, social change, ideology, revolution, nationalism politics, person, art, and law in *The Interpretation of Cultures, Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), and elsewhere. Usually, he uses these categories as sheer categorizations and not also as explanations.

*Frazer's Use of the Comparative Method*

In his *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* (1918) James Frazer seeks to show the primitive character of a seemingly advanced culture:

Despite the high moral and religious development of the ancient Hebrews, there is no reason to suppose that they formed an exception to this general law. They, too, had probably passed through a stage of barbarism and even of savagery; and this probability, based on the analogy of other races, is confirmed by an examination of their literature, which contains many references to beliefs and practices that can hardly be explained except on the supposition that they are rudimentary survivals from a far lower level of culture. It is to the illustration and explanation of a few such relics of ruder times, as they are preserved like fossils in the Old Testament, that I have addressed myself in the present work. . . . The instrument for the detection of savagery under civilization is the comparative method. . .<sup>35</sup>

Frazer's procedure is to note to some odd belief, practice, or incident in the Bible that the Bible itself fails to explain. He then turns to comparable cases around the world, makes sense of them, and applies that "solution" to the biblical case. The differences between Israelite and primitive religion do not faze him. He is concerned with only the similarities. Because the similarities are with primitive religion, Israelite religion is reduced to a primitive religion and, even more, to the yet earlier stage of magic.

For example, Frazer is struck by the Israelite fear of a census in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, which recounts 2 Samuel. While on other occasions — Numbers 1 and 26 — the census is not feared, in 2 Samuel God is said to be angry with Israel beforehand and orders King David to conduct a census in retaliation. Not only God but also David and his general Joab know that harm will thereby befall Israel. Joab objects to his king's order but is overruled. No sooner is the census completed than David himself regrets the deed and asks God, who had instructed him to undertake the census, for forgiveness for having undertaken it! God offers David three forms of punishment, and David

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<sup>35</sup> J.G. Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1918), I, vii-viii.

chooses one: three days of plague, which kills 70,000 Israelites. To quote 2 Samuel 24.1-15:

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go, count the people of Israel and Judah." So the king said to Joab and the commanders of the army, who were with him, "Go through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, and take a census of the people, so that I may know how many there are." . . . So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king to take a census of the people of Israel. . . . But afterward, David was stricken to the heart because he had numbered the people. David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly." When David rose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David: Thus says the Lord: Three things I offer you; choose one of them, and I will do it to you." So Gad came to David and told him; he asked him, "Shall three years of famine come to you on your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into human hands." So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died, from Dan to Beer-Sheba.

David then performs a triple penance, and God ends the plague. In the version of the incident in Chronicles it is Satan, not God, who prods David into taking the census. God there merely punishes Israel for the census and does not initiate it.

Incontestably, Frazer skirts many aspects of the event: why either God or Satan is angry with Israel; why God or Satan resorts to the census as the way of getting back at Israel; why David, knowing better, nevertheless carries out the census; why God offers David a choice of punishments; and why David chooses the punishment that he does. But Frazer does not claim to be answering these questions. He claims to be answering only one central question: why the census is feared. He cites case after case in which primitive and peasant peoples fear that counting something will lead to the loss of it:

The objection which Jehovah, or rather the Jews, entertained to the taking of a census appears to be simply a particular case of the general aversion which many

ignorant people feel to allowing themselves, their cattle, or their possessions to be counted. This curious superstition — for such it is — seems to be common among the black races of Africa. For example, among the Bakongo, of the Lower Congo, “it is considered extremely unlucky for a woman to count her children one, two, three, and so on, for the evil spirits will hear and take some of them away by death. The people themselves do not like to be counted; for they fear that counting will draw to them the attention of the evil spirits, and as a result of the counting some of them will soon die.” . . . Similar superstitions are to be found in Europe and in our own country to this day. . . . On the whole we may assume, with a fair degree of probability, that the objection which the Jews in King David’s time felt to the taking of a census rested on no firmer foundation than sheer superstition, which may have been confirmed by an outbreak of plague immediately after the numbering of the people.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, the superstition rests on the commission of the *post hoc, propter hoc* fallacy.

In the Bible itself counting is *sinful*: it incurs divine wrath. In Frazer’s primitive examples it is *unlucky*: it automatically sets off malevolent forces. By Frazer’s distinction, the effect of counting is magical, not religious, so that what in the Bible is manifestly a religious objection is for Frazer a magical one. God becomes a mechanical force unleashed by the counting rather than the agent of the plague. He is like a genie released from a bottle.

Lamentably, Frazer never specifies how counting subjects its victims to harm. Most likely, knowing the number of a group is akin to knowing its name, which is equivalent to possessing a portion of it, which by Frazer’s second law of magic is equivalent to possessing it all. Whoever learns the census total thereby controls the subject and can inflict harm on it by doing something to the name, which in magic is regarded as tangible. God does not initiate the counting. It is not clear who does. Nor is it clear who the magician is.

There is nothing objectionable in Frazer’s version of the comparative method. He is not claiming that the Israelite case is identical with the other ones, only similar. Rather than denying any differences, he is simply interested in the similarities. Rather than taking either the Is-

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., II, 557-63.

raelite case or the parallel ones out of their contexts, he first establishes them *as* cases of fear of a census. He then invokes the magical fear of counting as the common explanation of the cases. He offers his analysis “with a fair degree of probability,” not with certainty. He is able to make sense of the Israelite case because he is able to make sense of so many similar cases. The Israelite census was likely feared for magical reasons because elsewhere censuses have been feared for magical reasons.

Frazer’s use of the comparative method doubtless seems extreme because his analysis of the Davidic case does not merely commit him to a generalization but is itself the application of the generalization. This distinction is, however, false. Suppose Frazer were explicating the Davidic case internally. He would still be explicating it on the basis of a tacit generalization. His argument that the Israelites opposed censuses because they believed that counting unleashed malevolent forces would still rest on the generalization that whenever people believe that a census will unleash malevolent forces, they will fear it. Frazer would simply already have reached that generalization before studying the Israelite case. In truth, Frazer *has* reached that conclusion before opening the Bible. In presenting himself as initially puzzled, he is being rhetorical. He is presenting himself as an innocent, even devout reader of the Bible who cannot make sense of the story internally and so must turn to parallel cases to do so. But even if he were genuinely puzzled, he would not be exceeding the limits of the comparative method by enlisting it to explicate a particular case as well as to justify the explication by appeal to the generalization. At the same time the generalization must fit the Israelite case, and one can maintain that by Frazer’s own distinction, the case seems to be more magical than religious, for the fear is more of God’s decision to punish than of the unleashing of a mechanical force. But the issue is not whether Frazer’s analysis is persuasive. The issue is whether he is entitled to analyze the Israelite case cross-culturally.

*Smith's Use of the Comparative Method*

Like Frazer, William Robertson Smith in his *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889) seeks to demonstrate the primitive character of seemingly advanced religions:

[T]he right point of departure for a general study of Semitic religion must be sought in regions where, though our knowledge begins at a later date, it refers to a simpler state of society, and where accordingly the religious phenomena revealed to us are of an origin less doubtful and a character less complicated. In many respects the religion of heathen Arabia, though we have little information concerning it that is not of post-Christian date, displays an extremely primitive type, corresponding to the primitive and unchanging character of nomadic life.<sup>37</sup>

Yet Smith's brand of comparativism is milder than Frazer's. Smith begins by identifying the Semites as a distinct ethnographic group — an identification based on race, geography, and above all language. Undeniably, Smith proceeds to type Semitic religion as an *instance* of primitive religion. He even says that “though my facts and illustrations will be drawn from the Semitic sphere, a great part of what I shall have to say in the present lecture might be applied, with very trifling modifications, to the early religion of any other part of mankind.”<sup>38</sup> Still, Smith's demarcation of the Semites as a distinct group means that, unlike Frazer, he does not simply grant the differences between Semites and other primitives but is interested in them.

Furthermore, Smith is interested in the subsequent divergence between Semites and other groups — notably, Aryans:

[T]he two races, Aryans and Semites, began on lines which are so much alike as to be almost indistinguishable, and the divergence between their paths, which becomes more and more apparent in the course of the ages, was not altogether an affair of race and innate tendency, but depended in a great measure on the operation of special local and historical causes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 2nd ed. (London: A. and C. Black, 1894 [1st ed. 1889]), 14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

The desert kept the Arabs from advancing beyond tribalism. Subjection to Assyrian tyranny kept northern Semites from advancing as well.

Put another way, Smith's brand of comparativism is regional rather than worldwide — or more precisely, is regional as well as worldwide. He places Israel within the geographic context of Semitic religion. By contrast, Frazer's context is merely thematic. He matches up Israelite religion with all other religions, anywhere and any time, that are at the same stage of development. Frazer even rejects the anthropological call for merely regional comparisons, arguing that

We compare things on the ground of their similarity, and similarity is not affected by distance. Radium is alike on the earth and in the sun; it would be absurd to refuse to compare them on the ground that they are separated by many millions of miles. What would be thought of any other science which imposed on itself the restriction which some of our friends would inflict on anthropology? Would geology prosper if it confined its investigation, say, of sedimentary rocks to those of England and refused to compare those of Asia and America? How would zoology fare if the zoologist were forbidden to compare the animals of his own country with the animals of distant countries? the dogs, say, of Wales with the dogs of Africa and Australia?<sup>40</sup>

Still, Smith's regional comparativism is no less comparativist than Frazer's. The comparative method no more dictates the scale of comparisons than dictates the conclusions to be drawn. Ironically, critics of the comparative method often propose local comparisons as a corrective to the method — as if local comparisons were somehow less comparative.<sup>41</sup>

Built into the argument for contiguous comparisons is not only the assumption that these similarities are bound to be closer but also the assumption that cross-cultural influence accounts for the keener similarities. Regional comparisons tend to account for similarities by diffusion, where worldwide comparisons tend to account for them by independent invention, though there have been claims of worldwide diffusion. Frazer is unswervingly committed to independent invention

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<sup>40</sup> Frazer, "The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology," 240-41.

<sup>41</sup> The advocacy of "controlled comparison" allows for worldwide comparisons, simply of cases of phenomena of a narrower type: see Eggan, esp. 747-48.

as the source of similarities. To quote a famous passage from *The Golden Bough*,

We need not, with some enquirers in ancient and modern times, suppose that these Western peoples borrowed from the older civilisation of the Orient the conception of the Dying and Reviving God, together with the solemn ritual, in which that conception was dramatically set forth before the eyes of the worshippers. More probably the resemblance which may be traced in this respect between the religions of the East and West is no more than what we commonly, though incorrectly, call a fortuitous coincidence, the effect of similar causes acting alike on the similar constitution of the human mind in different countries and under different skies.<sup>42</sup>

But the comparative method itself, once again, seeks merely thematic connections and is not committed to any specific causes of the connections. The method should therefore be disentangled from the issue of independent invention versus diffusion, just as it should be separated from the issue of evolution.

For all Smith's regional comparisons, he, too, makes worldwide ones. He seeks the similarities between Semites and others — not just Aryans but, even more, primitives. Still, unlike Frazer, he appeals to cross-cultural comparisons less to *decipher* than to *confirm* his analysis of Semitic phenomena. He first works out the meaning of Semitic beliefs and practices from internal evidence. He focuses not, like Frazer, on quirky details but on whole institutions such as sacrifice. Only once he has determined the meaning of Semitic phenomena from Semitic evidence does he turn to parallels from elsewhere. Unlike Frazer, he depends on both internal and external evidence to validate his analysis:

To construct a theory of sacrifice exclusively on the Semitic evidence would be unscientific and misleading, but for the present purpose it is right to put the facts attested for the Semitic peoples in the foreground, and to call in the sacrifices of other nations to confirm or modify the conclusions to which we are led.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged ed. (London: Macmillan, 1922), 448.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 214-15.

In a vehement reply to a review of *Lectures* by A.H. Sayce, who charges that Smith “has really derived his theories from the anthropological material afforded by the comparative study of modern savage or barbarous communities, and has [merely] supported their application to the ancient Semitic world by evidence drawn from Arabia,”<sup>44</sup> Smith maintains that he in fact does the reverse: “My theories, as Prof. Sayce calls them, are derived from an analysis of the Semitic evidence, though I have often sought to illustrate and support my argument by comparing the institutions of other races.”<sup>45</sup> Adds Smith:

For example, a main point in my theory of sacrifice depends on the observation that, among early pastoral populations, the life of a domestic animal is regarded as possessing the same kind of sanctity with that of a tribesman. I believe that this holds good alike for the ancient Semites, for the ancient Greeks, and for many other races; and I have brought evidence to this effect, part of which is derived from modern rude societies. But when I first recognised that this view of the life of the victim is involved in the oldest forms of Semitic sacrificial ritual, I was not aware — and, so far as I know, anthropologists had not recognised — that the same thing was true of modern pastoral peoples. I was led from the Semites to a wider generalisation, and not conversely.<sup>46</sup>

In effect, Smith is defending himself against the charge that he operates like Frazer.

Take the issue of the nature of the earliest Semitic gods. Smith asserts that those gods are wrongly assumed to have been transcendent and otherworldly:

It is often said that the original Semitic conception of the godhead was abstract and transcendental; that while Aryan religion with its poetic mythology drew the gods down into the sphere of nature and of human life, Semitic religion always showed an opposite tendency, that it sought to remove the gods as far as possible

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<sup>44</sup> A.H. Sayce, review of Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, *Academy* 36 (November 30, 1889): 357. The quotation from Eilberg-Schwartz’s summary of the criticism of Frazer and Smith ends with a line from this review.

<sup>45</sup> William Robertson Smith, correspondence, *Academy* 36 (December 7, 1889): 374.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 374-75.

from man, and even contained within itself from the first the seeds of an abstract deism. According to this view, the anthropomorphisms of Semitic religion, that is, all expressions which in their literal sense imply that the gods have a physical nature cognate to that of man, are explained away as mere allegory, and it is urged, in proof of the fundamental distinction between the Aryan and Semitic conceptions of the divine nature, that myths like those of the Aryans, in which gods act like men, mingle with men, and in fact live a common life with mankind, have little or no place in Semitic religion.<sup>47</sup>

On the contrary, maintains Smith, the earliest Semitic gods were concrete and worldly: they and humans were kin.

Smith first appeals to Semitic evidence of kinship between humans and gods such as the mention of sex between the “sons of gods” and the “daughters of men” in Genesis 6. Similarly, he argues that

Nations, as distinguished from mere clans, are not constructed on the principle of kinship, and yet the Semitic nations habitually feigned themselves to be of one kin, and their national religions are deeply imbued, both in legend and in ritual, with the idea that the god and his worshippers are of one stock. This, I apprehend, is good evidence that the fundamental lines of all Semitic religion were laid down, long before the beginnings of authentic history, in that earliest stage of society when kinship was the only recognised type of permanent friendly relation between man and man, and therefore the only type on which it was possible to frame the conception of a permanent friendly relation between a group of men and a supernatural being.<sup>48</sup>

But Smith *also* appeals to cross-cultural generalizations about the development of all religions:

Some of the most notable and constant features of all ancient heathenism, and indeed of all nature-religions, . . . find their sufficient explanation in the physical kinship that unites the human and superhuman members of the same religious and social community . . . From this point of view the natural solidarity of the god and his worshippers, which has been already enlarged upon as characteristic of antique religion, at once becomes intelligible; the indissoluble bond that unites men to their god is the same bond of blood-fellowship which in early society is

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 48-49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

the one binding link between man and man, and the one sacred principle of moral obligation.<sup>49</sup>

According to Smith, the original form of any religion is totemism. To establish that the original form of Semitic religion was totemism as well, Smith notes the similarities between the Arabian *jinn*, or demons, and the totems of other religions. Like totems, *jinn* are animals, lack individuality, lack worshippers, and instead are the blood brothers of the members of the clan:

This conception of the communities of the *jinn* is precisely identical with the savage conception of the animal [i.e., totem] creation . . . A species of *jinn* allied by kinship with a tribe of men would be indistinguishable from a totem kind, and instead of calling the *jinn* gods without worshippers, we may, with greater precision, speak of them as potential totems without human kinsfolk.<sup>50</sup>

The parallels between *jinn* and totems make it inconceivable that *jinn* are other than Semitic totems.

#### *Frazer and Smith Compared*

The difference between Frazer and Smith is *not* that between the proper and the improper use of the comparative method. Both compare properly. The difference is that between a bolder and a tamer use of the method. Frazer uses the comparative method to make sense of otherwise inexplicable Israelite beliefs and practices. Smith uses it to confirm his own explication of Semitic beliefs and practices. Frazer makes far more cross-cultural comparisons than Smith, who, fittingly, cites Frazer most of all whenever he does.<sup>51</sup>

Frazer is concerned with only the similarities between Israelite and primitive phenomena. Smith is also concerned with the differences. Frazer seeks to show how advanced forms of religion are really mere survivals of earlier ones — indeed, survivals of magic rather than of religion. Smith strives to show how advanced forms of religion grow out of earlier ones. Where Frazer wants to demonstrate that no advance

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 127-30.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, ix.

has really occurred, Smith wants to demonstrate how far the advance has come.

To be sure, Frazer himself contends that in concentrating on the parallels between Israelites and primitives, he is not denying that Israelite religion transcended its primitive roots:

The scope of my work has obliged me to dwell chiefly on the lower side of ancient Hebrew life revealed in the Old Testament, on the traces of savagery and superstition which are to be found in its pages. But to do so is not to ignore, far less to disparage, that higher side of the Hebrew genius which has manifested itself in a spiritual religion and a pure morality, and of which the Old Testament is the imperishable monument. On the contrary, the revelation of the baser elements which underlay the civilization of ancient Israel, as they underlie the civilization of modern Europe, serves rather as a foil to enhance by contrast the glory of a people which, from such dark depths of ignorance and cruelty, could rise to such bright heights of wisdom and virtue, as sunbeams appear to shine with a greater effulgence of beauty when they break through the murky clouds of a winter evening than when they flood the earth from the serene splendour of a summer noon.<sup>52</sup>

Yet for all Frazer's acknowledgment of a "higher" side to Israelite religion, he is still maintaining that the "primitive" side survived alongside the later one, and it is the primitive side alone that he considers in *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*.

By contrast, Smith maintains that the primitive roots of Semitic religion actually got transformed *into* the "higher" religion of Judaism and, even more, of Christianity:

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are *positive* religions, that is, they did not grow up like the systems of ancient heathenism, under the action of unconscious forces operating silently from age to age, but trace their origin to the teaching of great religious innovators, who spoke as the organs of a divine revelation, and deliberately departed from the traditions of the past. [But] behind these positive religions [nevertheless] lies the old unconscious religious tradition, the body of religious usage and belief which cannot be traced to the influence of individual minds, and was not propagated on individual authority, but formed part of that inheritance from the past into which successive generations of the Semitic race grew up as it were instinctively, taking it as a matter of course that

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<sup>52</sup> Frazer, vol. 1, x-xi.

they should believe and act as their fathers had done before them. The positive Semitic religions had to establish themselves on ground already occupied by these older beliefs and usages; they had to displace what they could not assimilate and whether they rejected or absorbed the elements of the older religion, they had at every point to reckon with them and take up a definite attitude towards them.<sup>53</sup>

While Smith is scarcely denying that the “positive,” or higher, religions evolve out of primitive ones, he is simultaneously stressing what they evolve *into*. It is therefore incorrect to lump him with Frazer, as is typically done. He uses the comparative method to establish the differences as well as the similarities between Israelite and primitive religion.

Take, for example, Smith’s analysis of sacrifice, for him the heart of Israelite religion. He begins by stressing the similarities between primitive and Israelite sacrifice. On the one hand even the post-exilic Israelite notion of sacrifice as atonement for sin rests on the primitive notion of sacrifice as communion with God:

The one point that comes out clear and strong is that the fundamental idea of ancient sacrifice is sacramental communion, and that all atoning rites are ultimately to be regarded as owing their efficacy to a communication of divine life to the worshippers, and to the establishment or confirmation of a living bond between them and their god.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand even primitive and pre-exilic Israelite notions of sacrifice harbor the supposedly exclusively higher concepts of “redemption, substitution, purification, atoning blood, the garment of righteousness.”<sup>55</sup> Within primitive religion itself misfortunes like plague and famine come to be attributed to the weakening of the bond between the community and god, and sacrifice serves to restore the bond. Eventually, the weakening comes to be attributed to sin, and sacrifice comes to be taken as atonement. Nevertheless, the aim of atonement is the restoration of the bond between the community and its god. In its fullest, Christian form, God sacrifices himself to atone for

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

the sins of the worldwide community, though Jesus' death still serves primarily to restore the fellowship between humanity and God.

Despite Smith's insistence on the presence of both communion and atonement in primitive and higher religion alike, there remains for him a gulf between these stages of religion. In primitive religion spiritual and ethical idea like atonement, redemption, and purification, while present, "are very vaguely defined; they indicate impressions produced on the mind of the worshipper by features of the ritual, rather than formulated ethico-dogmatical ideas . . ."<sup>56</sup> That is, the higher notions of spiritual communion and of sacrifice as atonement are not yet differentiated from the lowlier notions of physical communion and of sheer communion: "In primitive ritual this conception [of communion] is grasped in a merely physical and mechanical shape, as indeed, in primitive life, all spiritual and ethical ideas are still wrapped up in the husk of a material embodiment."<sup>57</sup> In primitive religion the goal is physical contact with god — a goal achieved through the shared eating of a sacrifice, which in its earliest form is the eating of the totemic god itself. Initially, little attention is paid to the cause of the separation from god or to the justification for it.

Consequently, "To free the spiritual truth from the husk was the great task that lay before the ancient religions, if they were to maintain the right to continue to rule the minds of men."<sup>58</sup> Smith grants that "some progress in this direction was made, especially in Israel."<sup>59</sup> It was the Prophets who severed communion and thereby atonement from physical sacrifice — Smith taking the Prophets as altogether anti-ritualistic. Once communion came to be conceived of spiritually, separation from god came to be conceived of ethically, as a matter of the justification for the separation and of the amends needed for overcoming it. But the subsequent, post-exilic restoration of physical sacrifice conflated anew the spiritual and the ethical with the physical. Only

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

with Christianity were the spiritual and the ethical fully disentangled from the physical.

For Smith, so extraordinary a feat was this disentangling that it can only be attributed to God: "But on the whole it is manifest that none of the ritual systems of antiquity was able by mere natural development to shake itself free from the congenital defect inherent in every attempt to embody spiritual truth in material form."<sup>60</sup> In other words, human beings on their own could never have made the leap from a physical conception of sacrifice to a purely spiritual one. Only God's intercession, undertaken indirectly through inspiration, can account for the jump. In short, Smith is clearly at least as much impressed by how far Prophetic religion and Christianity came as by what they came from.

Frazer, a consummate skeptic, stresses how scant the progress has been from primitives to moderns. Moderns are primitives in disguise, and advanced religion is really only the continuation of magic. By contrast, Smith, a devout Christian, stresses how much progress there has been — from religion as materialist, ritualist, collectivist, and amoral to religion as spiritual, creedal, individualist, and scrupulously moral. Still, Smith no less than Frazer employs the comparative method to make his case, and Frazer no less than Smith does so admirably.<sup>61</sup>

### *Conclusion*

My defense of the comparative method, as illustrated by the differing uses to which Frazer and Smith put it, is that the method is open-ended. It can be used to decipher the differences among phenomena as well as to decipher the similarities. It can be used locally, regionally,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 439-40.

<sup>61</sup> On the differences between Smith's and Frazer's uses of the comparative method see also Robert Alun Jones, "Robertson Smith and James Frazer on Religion: Two Traditions in British Social Anthropology," in *Functionalism Historicized*, ed. George Stocking (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 35-37; Robert Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 84-85.

or universally. It can be used to compare any number of phenomena. By itself, the method simply categorizes phenomena, but the categorization prompts the quest for an explanation of the similarities or the differences found among cases of the category. The method dictates no one explanation and is compatible with any. Any explanation offered, whether of one case or of them all, is necessarily a generalization. In accounting for a phenomenon, as in categorizing it, generalization is unavoidable. In providing the categories on which accounts rest, the comparative method is indispensable.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

RICHARD HUGHES SEAGER, *Buddhism in America* (Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series) — New York: Columbia University Press 1999 (314 p.) ISBN 0-231-10868-0 (hc.) US \$35.00.

This book is a most welcome contribution to the emerging field of the study of American Buddhism. In the past five years, several monographs and edited volumes detailing ever more sophisticated research on the subject has emerged from both scholars of American religions and Buddhist studies. *Buddhism in America*, written by an eminent historian of American religion, serves as an overview of the growing literature, but written in such a way that both scholars and the general public would find it well written and accessible.

The book is organized into three distinct sections. The first four chapters serve as background reading on the major doctrines, practices, and historical developments of Buddhism prior to its arrival in the United States as well as a general overview of the American religious landscape. The second major division (Cpts. 5-10) is organized around a number of important sects of Buddhism as they arrive in the United States either as immigrant religions or alternative religions to the American mainstream. Each chapter covers the basic history of each sect (including the Japanese lineages of Jodo Shinshu, Zen, and Soka Gakkai as well as Tibetan, Theravada, and East Asian lineages) illustrating the establishment of Buddhist temples with interesting features on individual figures.

The third major division (Cpts. 11-14) is organized around some key themes that scholars of American Buddhism wrestled with in the past decade, including the “Americanization” of Buddhism in terms of gender equity, social engagement in societal and environmental issues, and inter-faith dialogue. Seager concludes his highly readable narrative with some reflections on how American Buddhism might develop in the future.

This type of narrative history of American Buddhism, as opposed to specialized monographs, has always been difficult to write and many scholars have preferred to focus on particular traditions or themes. Rick Fields’ *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Shambhala 1981 and updated 1992) has long served as the text of choice for this type of history. But with both the

changes in the faces of American Buddhism (especially with the rise of South and Southeast Asian immigrant Buddhism and the higher profile of Tibetan Buddhism both among its refugee and convert communities) as well as in the recent scholarship, Seager's book is a welcome addition.

There are a few very minor reservations that might be raised about specific interpretations in the text. For example, Seager's characterization of Rinzai Zen as "less formal and ritualistic than Soto Zen" (p. 29) or how Japanese-American temples served a wide range of religious and social functions "unlike in Japan" (p. 54) need more nuanced discussion. Rinzai Zen monastic life is just as formal and ritualistic as Soto Zen. Scholars have also finally recognized just how diverse Japanese temples functions have been. These minor matters of interpretation may have been put a different way by a scholar of Asian Buddhism, but for a scholar of American religion, Seager's command of the material is extremely strong. Indeed,

Seager's perspective as an Americanist comes to the fore when he skillfully brings in comparative narratives from Christianity and immigration history in the United States.

One of the most interesting things about American Buddhism is the fact that during the 2500-year course of Buddhist history, all the varieties of Buddhist sects and lineages have assembled in one place at the same time. This exciting mix of traditions (old-line Buddhists such as the Japanese from the turn of the century, convert Buddhists, as well as new immigrant Buddhism) shows the diversity of what is now being called American Buddhism. Seager's book is an admirable attempt to make sense of this emerging phenomenon and the scholarship on it.

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DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS

DAVID WESTERLUND and INGVAR SVANBERG (eds.), *Islam Outside the Arab World*. Richmond: Curzon Press 1999 (xii + 476 p.). ISBN 0-7007-1124-4 (cloth) £45.00.

Nowadays, non-Arab Muslims constitute about 85 per cent of the world population of Muslims. In spite of their numerical importance, good compendiums surveying the Muslim groups in the different regions outside the

Arab world are still rare. The aim of this book is to supply this deficiency and to present Islam and its current renewal among non-Arab Muslims and its growth in non-Arab countries.

The book is clearly structured. After a general introduction sketching some Islamic institutions in broad outlines the book has been arranged according to three broad geographical areas, viz. Africa, Asia and Oceania, and Europe and the Americas. Within this scheme some twenty chapters are focussing on single countries or related regions. The historical and social background of each country or region is presented brief and to the point. In each chapter special attention has been paid to the role of sufism, fundamentalist tendencies, the relationship between Islam and Christianity, the relationship between national identity and Islamic identity, and some political issues such as the position of the Islamic Law and the revival of Islam. Then, some characteristics and problems specific to each country or region are dealt with. To give only three examples, the chapter on China shows the central government's concern with security, and law and order as far as its Muslim minorities are concerned. In the chapter on South Asia, the restrictive measures vis-à-vis women in Pakistan are mentioned, while with regard to India the tense relationship between Muslims and Hindus is brought up. In the chapter on France the Algerian war of independence and its ill effects for the perception of Muslims in France is considered. Finally, each chapter contains an up-to-date bibliography which enables the reader to gain more in-depth knowledge.

The book edited by Westerlund and Svanberg is a fair and laudable attempt to present the general reader and the starter in Islamic studies with some good, basic, and well-structured information on Islam outside the Arab World. For the specialist in Islamic studies this publication will be useful for comparative reasons. However, on his or her own region or field of expertise he or she will find little if any new data. A publication aiming to present Islam outside the Arab world runs the risk of omitting one or more countries. Thus, the reader of *Islam Outside the Arab World* will search in vain for the Benelux countries, the Iberian peninsula and Italy, to mention only three examples.

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### *Periodicals*

HISTORY OF RELIGIONS, 40 (2001), 3

*Talal Asad*, Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*

*Christian K. Wedemeyer*, Tropes, Typologies, and Turnarounds: A Brief Genealogy of the Historiography of Tantric Buddhism

*Tony K. Stewart*, In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through

Translation Theory

Book reviews

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(Listing in this section does not preclude subsequent reviewing)

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# THE COSMIC JOURNEY OF ODYSSEUS<sup>1</sup>

NANNO MARINATOS

*We are left to ourselves within a highly complicated cosmos which allows neither tale nor picture for description, but only the most abstract mathematics, with a Big Bang as its first beginning and possibly a Black Hole as its final singularity.*

Walter Burkert

## *Summary*

In vain have scholars tried to produce a coherent geographical picture of Odysseus' travels. It is argued here that Odysseus makes a cosmic journey at the edges of the earth (*perata ges*), a phrase used in the text to describe several lands that the hero visits.

The cosmic journey was a genre current in the East Mediterranean region in the Iron Age. It was modeled on the Egyptian the journey of the sun god who travels twelve hours in the darkness of the underworld and twelve hours in the sky. Evidence of similar concepts in the Near East is provided by a Babylonian circular map (now in the British Museum) as well as by Phoenician circular bowls. Gilgamesh seems to perform a cosmic journey. As well, Early Greek cosmology utilizes the concept of a circular *cosmos*.

Odysseus' journey spans the two cosmic junctures of the universe: East, where Circe resides, and West, where Calypso lives. Another polar axis is the underworld and the island of the sun.

## *1. Introduction*

It is well known that Greek cosmogonic myths are indebted to the Near East,<sup>2</sup> but credit is seldom given to Egyptian traditions. One of

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<sup>1</sup> My warmest thanks to Walter Burkert, Minna Skafte Jensen, Othmar Keel, Linda Morgan, and Einar Thomassen for much improving this manuscript. The errors remain mine.

<sup>2</sup> Recently, Burkert 1999a, 1999b:35-57; West 1997:137 ff.

the aims of this paper is to suggest that the Egyptian journey of the sun around a circular cosmos was the original model for the adventures of Odysseus' around the world.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that these adventures were not directly derived from Egyptian sources; rather, they reflect a type of tale which had become a common East Mediterranean tradition by the Iron Age and was mediated *via* the Phoenicians. This tale entailed the hero's journey to the end of the universe. Another example of such a tale from Greek mythology is the *Argonautica*.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. *Egyptian Underworld Concepts*

The journey of the sun is fundamental to Egyptian tradition. It is recorded in tombs, sarcophagi, papyri and other documents of pharaonic times. Although the sun's voyage, known as "the path of the two ways," goes back to the Middle Kingdom, a more articulate version was accomplished only in the New Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> What is important for our purposes is that the journey with its magical and regenerative ramifications continues into the Egyptian late period, corresponding

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<sup>3</sup> Page 1955, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Affinities between the *Odyssey* and the *Argonautica* have been noticed, the implication being that both stories have a cosmic aspect. Meuli 1974 sees the *Argonautica* as the model of the *Odyssey*. He thinks the geography of the *Odyssey* is confused—contrary to what will be argued here—because it was not invented for the *Odyssey* but for the *Argonautica* which he locates on the Black Sea. See, recently, Tsagarakis 1995 (a somewhat narrow view, suspicious of Near Eastern sources); Strasburger 1998, with bibliography. A connection with solar symbolism has been pointed out by Frame 1998. He however suspects an Indo-European connection for the journey of Odysseus rather than an East Mediterranean one.

<sup>5</sup> Piankoff 1939-62. Overviews in Bonnet 1952 s.v. "Amduat," 17-20; Hornung 1984; Budge 1905-6. Bibliography in Hornung 1990, chs. 1 and 7. In the New Kingdom, the journey of the sun god is recorded in royal tombs: Thutmosis III, Amenophis II, Sethi I, Ramses VI and IX. Recent overview in Hornung, 1990, with bibliography. The journey is also recorded in the decoration of sarcophagi as well as on papyri placed within the coffins. Accessible editions: Rossiter 1979; Faulkner 1985.

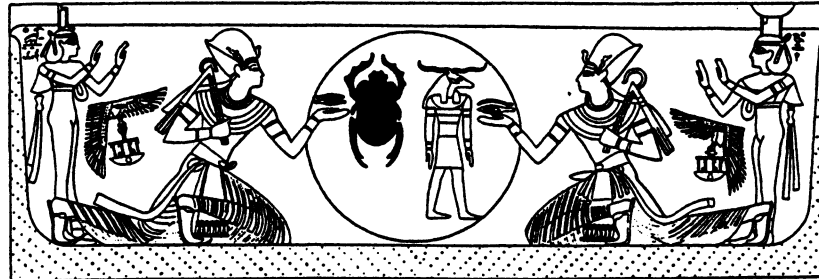


Figure 1.

to the Iron Age and Early Archaic Periods of Greece.<sup>6</sup> We will not be concerned here with the various ramifications of the sun's path, but sketch out only the most fundamental concepts.

The sun travels around the universe completing a full circle every day. Half of his path is in the light and half is in the darkness. There are several ways to render this image, but the predominant features are two: the circular path and the East-West polarity. The fundamental concepts are always the same. The sun goes through darkness in the underworld, but is regenerated every morning when he is born (as a child or a scarab) in the East.

Visually, the sun has many guises and not only that of a disc. What concerns us here are his two distinct life stages. When he is young, he is a child or a scarab; when he is old, he is a ram-headed god. Sometimes both guises are shown together, suggesting the span of a life time. On Fig. 1, the scarab and the ram-headed god coexist within the disc. The disc rises between the western and eastern horizon (rendered as horn-like mountain peaks), and is worshipped by the double image of a kneeling pharaoh and the two sisters Isis and Nephthys. The journey is not explicit here, but it is suggested by the two ages of the sun as young

<sup>6</sup> Evidence for the sun's journey in the Late Period exists as well: Niwinski 2000; Papyrus Berlin 30001 (21st Dynasty) in Bonnet 1952, 18. A tomb painting from the Bahariya oasis has paintings with the sun's journey: Z. Hawass (forthcoming). Egyptian literature of the Iron Age included travel fantasy stories (A. Loprieno, forthcoming; personal communication).

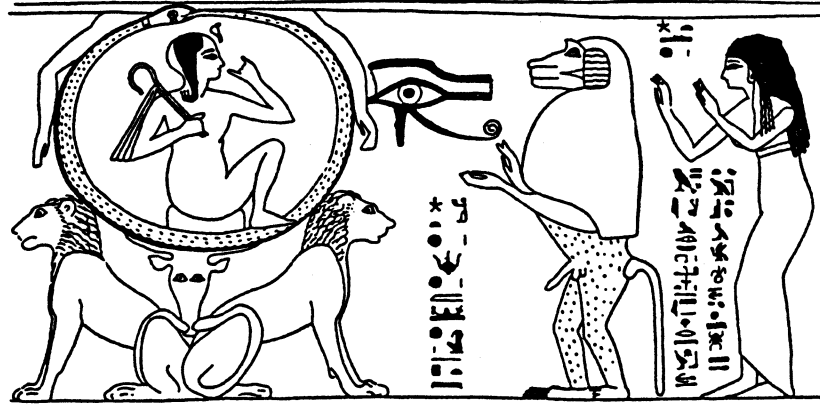


Figure 2.

in the morning and old in the evening, as well as by the East-West axis of the double horizon.

Circularity is behind another figure invented by the Egyptians: the cosmic serpent, called by Greeks *ouroboros* (he who eats his own tail).<sup>7</sup> The serpent has a circular shape, thus being both his beginning and his end (Fig. 2). Normally, the *ouroboros* encircles the sun disc; in the centre is a child representing the young sun god. Sometimes he is supported by a cow's head,<sup>8</sup> which according to one theory represents the sun's journey in an abbreviated fashion.<sup>9</sup> The *boukephalion* appears also on scarabs.<sup>10</sup> Since the latter travel easily, these amulets may have been the carriers of the imagery which diffused Egyptian concepts. The idea that the sun was connected with cattle may well have reached wider cultural groups. (Did the idea of the cattle of the sun in the *Odyssey* arise in this way? In Babylonian cosmology as well there is a mythical region which is designated as the home of cattle.) To return

<sup>7</sup> The *ouroboros* appears first in the period of Tutankhamun: Hornung 2000.

<sup>8</sup> It could be identified as an aspect of Hathor, the celestial cow, but important arguments against this theory have been advanced by Hornung 1990, 107-114. See also Keel and Schroer 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Hornung and Staehlin 1976.

<sup>10</sup> Keel and Schroer 1998.

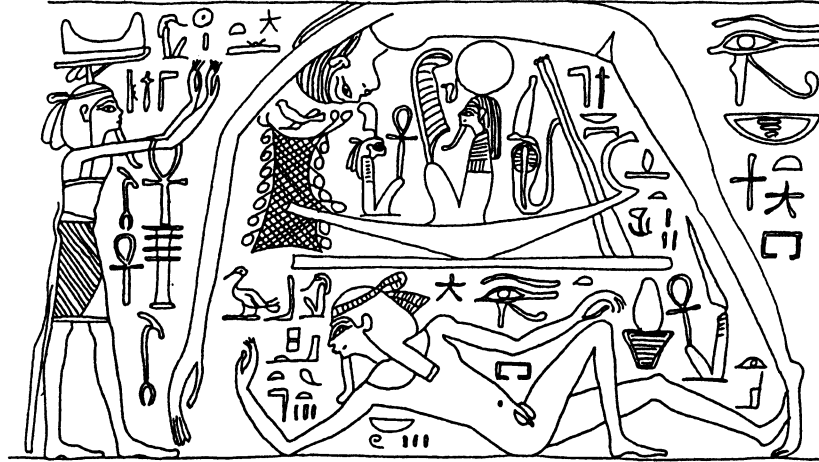


Figure 3.

to the circle, we note that the *ouroboros* is flanked by two lions; they represent the West and the East (Fig. 2). This is important to note in so far as the East-West axis is emphasised as much as the circle.

A totally different image entails the sun disk shown in connection with the body of the goddess Nut who represents the sky. The sun travels along the body or inside it in a barque, or is shown right below Nut, as on a 21st Dynasty Papyrus (Fig. 3). On this figure, the cosmos is divided into a lower half defined by the reclining earth god Geb and an upper half with the sky goddess Nut. The barque of the sun is in the upper half.

Thus, the division into two hemispheres is important. Since the sun travels both in the daylight and in the darkness, his journey is divided into two halves: one section is above the earth, the other below it (see above Fig. 3). The equivalence of the concepts “darkness” and “underworld” must be noted: the underworld becomes homologous to (although not identical with) night, which is represented by the female goddess Nut. She is an ambivalent figure embodying both death and birth: she swallows the sun in the evening and gives birth to him in the morning. Because of her central importance as both the originator and destroyer of the sun, Nut is sometimes painted in the ceilings of

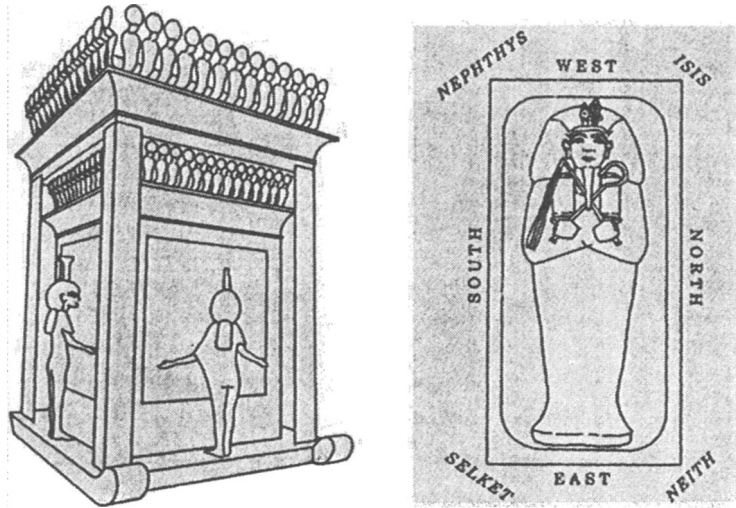


Figure 4.

royal tombs or temples, more often on sarcophagi.<sup>11</sup> The body of the goddess represents the dangerous part of the journey; the other half of the sun's path entails no dangers, and is therefore not recorded.<sup>12</sup> The ambivalence of female deities as the source of both death and birth is shared with Near Eastern and Greek religion.

We turn now to two important Egyptian female deities who protect the dead: the twin sisters Isis and Nephthys. On the anthropoid coffin of Tutankhamun (Fig. 4), the twin goddesses become four sisters; together they define the cardinal points of the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> We should note then that the East-West axis can be defined by lions (Fig. 2) or goddesses (Figs. 1 and 4). In a way, Nut herself is split up into two females who define the edges of the cosmos (Fig. 4). "Her lower body is in the East, her head in the West," states the cenotaph of Sethi I.<sup>14</sup> Note that two goddesses feature also on a circular Phoenician bowl

<sup>11</sup> Bonnet 1952, s.v. "Nut," 536-539.

<sup>12</sup> Hornung, 1990, 79, pls. 68, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson 1994, 78-81.

<sup>14</sup> Bonnet 1952, 537.



Figure 5.

(see below, Fig. 9). The cosmos is thus not only circular but bipolar and a constant tension characterises its structure.

Finally let us note that the arched body of female Nut is supported by a male god.<sup>15</sup> The idea that heaven is supported by a male figure reminds one of Atlas's role in Greek cosmology; there is even an equivalent figure among the Hittites (see table below).

Another important concept of the Egyptian netherworld is that of "gates" (Fig. 5). Gates correspond to the twelve hours of the night and are guarded by special keepers.<sup>16</sup> Each gate represents an obstacle and a test. If the right spell is not recited, the soul cannot go any further.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the journey of the sun is also followed by the soul of the dead. It thus furnishes a model of universal validity which could be easily followed by "the hero."

### 3. *Babylonian and Hebrew Cosmologies*

The Babylonian cosmos is conceived as either a rectangle with four points, the expression "four corners of the earth" being common,<sup>18</sup> or as a circular cosmos. We fortunately possess a cosmic map drawn on a clay tablet (now in the British Museum) which most likely dates to the seventh century B.C. (Fig. 6). This important tablet includes

<sup>15</sup> Keel 1978, 36-36, figs. 21, 25-26, 32. Sometimes the figure who supports heaven is the pharaoh, who thus symbolises stability and order. For the concept of the cosmic pillar in E. Mediterranean cosmogonies, see Burkert 1999; West 1997, 148-149. See also table below.

<sup>16</sup> On some papyri, the gates of the underworld are seven, which corresponds to the Near Eastern tradition. On the "Book of Gates," see Hornung 1984, 197 ff.

<sup>17</sup> For the journey of the sun in royal tombs and papyri: Hornung 1984; 1990, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Hunger 1980-83, 222-23.

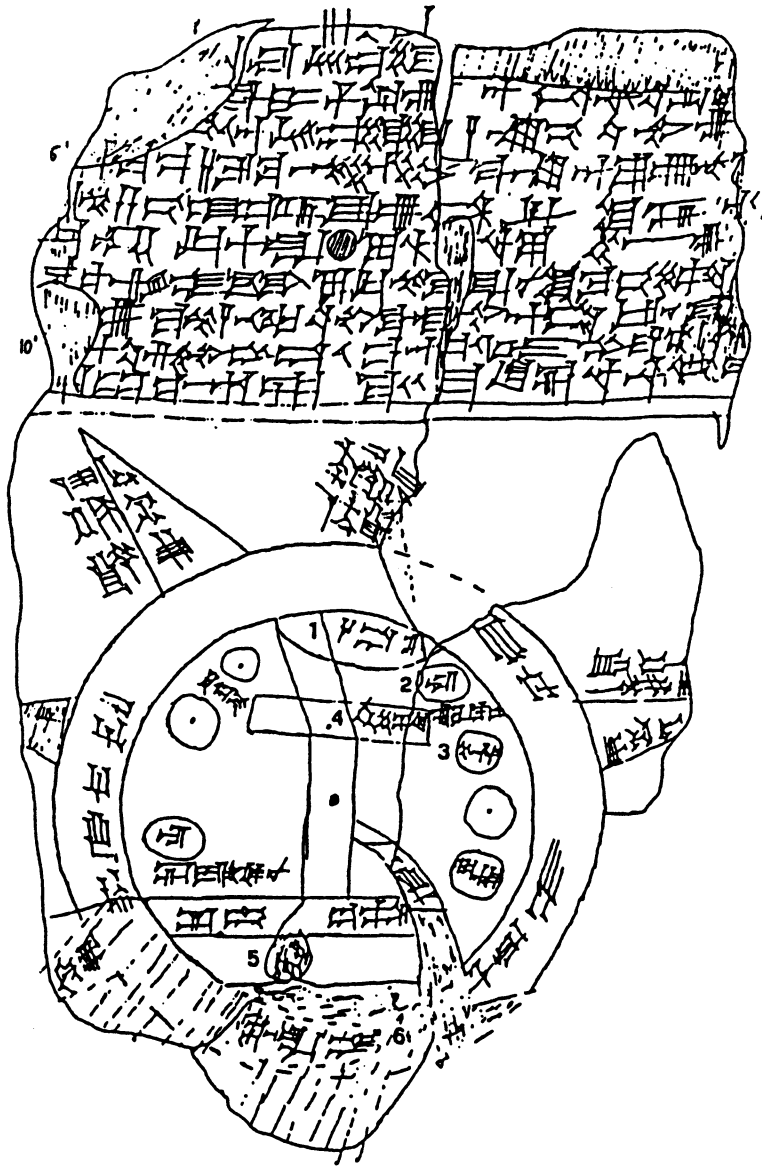


Figure 6.

descriptions of the world's remote regions on the obverse.<sup>19</sup> The cosmos is surrounded by a primeval river (*maratu*). Mythical regions, rendered as triangles, abut the edges of the primeval river which surrounds the circle. At its the centre, on the other hand, are real cities like Babylon.<sup>20</sup> Three triangles are extant on the tablet, but eight can be safely reconstructed.<sup>21</sup> The regions at the edges of the cosmos can be compared to the places Odysseus visits on his journey. On the obverse of the tablet, one region (*nagu*) is designated as one of darkness; another as that of the horned cattle. They remind one of Hades and the island of the sun in the *Odyssey*.<sup>22</sup> (Below, Fig. 11).

In Babylonian cosmology, the sun circumnavigates the cosmos in a boat, even passing through the underworld (the Egyptian model again). Gilgamesh also follows the path of the sun.<sup>23</sup> We shall return to Gilgamesh further on. In the Near East, the universe was multi-tiered—divided into heaven, earth and underworld. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the mountain *Mashu* was said to have its root in the underworld and its peak in the firmament.<sup>24</sup> One ascended to the gods in the sky and descended to the underworld below. The ghosts ascend to the living, the living descend below.<sup>25</sup> Consider also a passage in the Old Testament:

I ascend to *heaven*.  
I make my bed in *Sheol* [underworld].  
I take the wings of the *morning* [East]  
and dwell in the *uttermost parts of the sea* [West].<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Br. Mus. 92687; Hunger 1980-83, 222-23; Horowitz 1998, 20 ff.; West 1997, 145; Strasburger 1998, 26, fig. 1; Keel 1978, 21, fig. 8; Black and Green 1992, 53, fig. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Hunger 1980-83, 222; Horowitz 1998, 20 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Keel 1978, 23, speaks of cosmic island mountains.

<sup>22</sup> West 1997, 147.

<sup>23</sup> Hunger 1980-83, 222-23.

<sup>24</sup> *Gilgamesh* IX-X, Assyrian version. See Horowitz 1998, 98 with comparanda.

<sup>25</sup> West 1997, 138-139, 155-156; Penglase 1994, 91-91; Strasburger 1998, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ps. 138, 8-9; transl. Keel 1978, 23.

Here, the vertical as well as the horizontal axes are taken into account. As O. Keel has shown, complementary bipolar concepts operate in this biblical text. On the one hand, there is an antithesis between up and down, "heaven-underworld"; on the other, East and West are juxtaposed; they are metaphors for life and death. Thus the vertical and horizontal planes are complementary and oftentimes used side by side, as is also the case in Greek cosmology.<sup>27</sup>

Gates are present in Near Eastern cosmology similarly to Egypt. The underworld (*ganzir*) has seven gates with guardians; these gates are sometimes assimilated to the idea of mountains as barriers.<sup>28</sup> The sun god himself rises between twin mountains, which in myth and imagery are represented as gates. On an Akkadian seal, the gates are surmounted by lions, as is also the case in Egyptian imagery.<sup>29</sup> Gilgamesh, on his way to the regions of the netherworld, passes through mountains/gates guarded by special keepers (more on this below). The Greeks also conceived of Hades as having a gate, guarded by the monstrous Cerberus. I shall be arguing later that some of the obstacles that Odysseus encounters are equivalent to gates in that they are barriers that cannot be traversed by everyone.

#### 4. *Phoenician Bowls Depicting the Cosmos*

We do not know much about Phoenician literary traditions,<sup>30</sup> but the geographical conception of the cosmos can be deduced from images. A series of Phoenician circular bowls made of precious metals, known as *phialae*, were popular throughout the Mediterranean and found their way to Cyprus, Crete, Greece and Italy during the Iron Age and the Orientalizing period.<sup>31</sup> The shape of the *phialae* suggests a circular cosmos, as on Fig. 7.

<sup>27</sup> West 1997, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the Akkadian myth of the Descent of Ishtar: Pritchard 1973, 80-84. See also Strasburger 1998, 7; West 1997, 151-167.

<sup>29</sup> Keel 1978, 22, fig. 9.

<sup>30</sup> West 1997, 100-101.

<sup>31</sup> Markoe 1985.

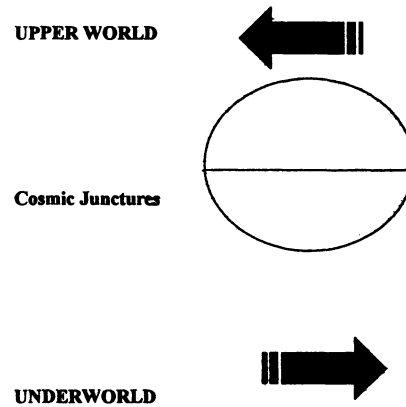


Figure 7.

One specimen, found at Praeneste (Fig. 8), depicts the adventures of a king and his son; the episodes are rendered as a series of scenes aligned along the rim of the bowl.<sup>32</sup> Most scholars think that the episodes reflect a lost tale.<sup>33</sup> What has been less noticed is that the king and his son are on a cosmic journey. This can be argued because a cosmic serpent, an *ouroboros*, encircles the bowl and bites his own tail.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the cosmic journey which in Egypt is connected with the dead or the sun, is here accomplished by a mythical king or hero. This hero (1) leaves home; (2) traverses mythical regions pictured as mountains; (3) shoots a stag; (4) offers it to a sun goddess; (5) encounters a wild man; (6) is saved by a winged sun goddess—this may mean that he has arrived at the island of the sun, as did Odysseus; (7) defeats other wild men; (8) finally returns home having completed a full circle along the rim of the bowl. The style is Syro-Phoenician-Egyptian, a product of stylistic as well as conceptual syncretism.<sup>35</sup> An image of the Egyptian pharaoh smiting his enemies decorates the

<sup>32</sup> Markoe 1985, 67-68; Karageorgis 1988, fig. 18a; Gütterbock, 1957, 62-71. There is a similar one in Cyprus: Fittschen 1973, 9-10, fig 3; Karageorgis 1988, 46, fig. 17.

<sup>33</sup> Burkert 1992, 104; West 1997, 100-101.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to Prof. V. Karageorghis for drawing my attention to this object.

<sup>35</sup> Gubel 2000, 185-214.



*Figure 8.*

centre. The symbol of the pharaoh, placed in the centre of the cosmos as it were, can be taken as a pictogram of order which encapsulates the triumph of the king and legitimises the hero's victory in the form of this traditional pictorial formula. For our purposes, the bowl is significant. It shows that the cosmic journey was current in the Levant at the end of the Iron Age.

Another Phoenician bowl, found at Olympia, depicts a series of episodes that may depict the life cycle of a hero (Fig. 9): his birth, his combat with a griffin with the help of a bearded man; scenes of music. Note the twin naked figures at the horizontal axis of the circle.



Figure 9.

They may be taken as the equivalents of Isis and Nephthys of Egypt and of Circe and Calypso in the *Odyssey*.

Finally another bowl should be mentioned briefly (Fig. 10).<sup>36</sup> It depicts the sun-barque with the various guises of the sun along the rim of the cosmos. Note the image of the pharaoh smiting his enemies in the centre. The influence of Egypt on the Syro-Phoenician coast is well documented on this bowl.

<sup>36</sup> Markoe 1985, 274, E1.



Figure 10.

##### 5. The Greek Cosmos

A circular cosmos is definitely implied in the description of Achilles' shield in *Iliad* 18.607, where the ocean encircles the inhabited world and stars are placed in the centre. The imagery must have been inspired by Phoenician bowls or Oriental and Early Greek shields.<sup>37</sup> These objects have the circular shape in common; this is what makes them natural candidates for the depiction of a microcosm. The ocean on Achilles' shield is conceived as a river running along the outer rim. Similarly in Hesiod's *Theogony*, the river Ocean encloses the sea

<sup>37</sup> Fittschen 1973.

(790 ff.) The Ocean is also the place from which the sun rises and into which he sets; waters thus define the borders of the universe.<sup>38</sup>

Herodotus in the fifth century B.C. describes how his predecessors drew the world as a circle, surrounded by the river Ocean (Hdt. IV, 36). This circular map is attributed to Anaximander, but Hecataeus also seems to have conceived of a circular world.<sup>39</sup>

In summary, the circular cosmos is common to Egyptian, Near Eastern and Greek traditions. In addition these cultures share the duality of up and down, the antithesis between East and West, and the ambivalence of female deities. The results of the comparative cosmogonies of the East Mediterranean are illustrated in the Table 1.

TABLE 1

Egypt	Babylon	Syro/Phoenicia	Greece
Encircling waters	Encircling waters Cosmic river	?	Encircling waters (ocean)
Circular cosmos	Circular Cosmos	Circular Cosmos	Circular Cosmos
Females: Nut, Isis and Nephthys	Ishtar	Twin goddesses on bowl (Fig. 9)	Twin Goddesses Circe and Calypso
Cosmic Serpent: <i>Ouroboros</i>		Cosmic Serpent <i>Ouroboros</i>	?
God Shu upholds heaven	Hittite giant Upelluri bears the world in the Ullikummi myth. <sup>40</sup>		Atlas upholds heaven
	Gates of Underworld	?	Gates of Night (Parmenides)
Gates of Sun			Gates of Sun <i>Od.</i> 24.12.

<sup>38</sup> West, 143-147.

<sup>39</sup> How and Wells 1912, *in loc.*

<sup>40</sup> Haas 1982, 159.

6. *The Cosmic Junctures: The House of Night and the House of the Rising Sun*

The sun's journey around the circle in Egyptian thought entails two distinct paths: one of darkness in one half of the hemisphere, and one of light in the other half (Fig. 7). Let us see if this model works well also for the cosmic map of Archaic Greece.

Archaic thought utilises the concepts of "path" and "gate." Parmenides speaks of the "gates of night and paths of day" (frg. 1.5.11, Diels-Kranz). This echoes closely the description in the *Odyssey* that "the paths of day and night are close" (*Od.* 10.86).<sup>41</sup> There is only one way to understand the closeness of the paths visually. If you imagine a circle with the path of day in its upper half and the path of night in its lower half, there will be two points in the circle where the two halves meet (Fig. 7). These points are the East and the West: the cosmic junctures of the universe. Their symmetry is perceived as near identity, hence "the paths of day and night" may meet at either point. There is further evidence that the paths of day and night meet at cosmic junctures. Hesiod in *Theog.* 744 says that night and day pass each other at the "House of Night." In the *Odyssey* we are told that the paths of day and night are close at a place called "Tele-pylos," which is where Odysseus and company stop before they reach Circe's island (see Fig. 11). Consequently we must determine where Circe's island is located and if she has any connection with a cosmic juncture.

Circe is a daughter of the sun (Hes. *Theog.* 1011 ff.). Her island, Aiaie, is described as where "dawn has her house, and where there are dancing places and the sun rises . . ." (*Od.* 12.3-4). Thus, Circe's island, the "House of the Rising Sun," is located at the eastern cosmic juncture.

What about Calypso? According to the scheme proposed here, and because she is a female deity with a function similar to that of Circe, she should be located at the western juncture, the beginning of the

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<sup>41</sup> Comparison between Parmenides and Homer made by Frame 1978, 60.

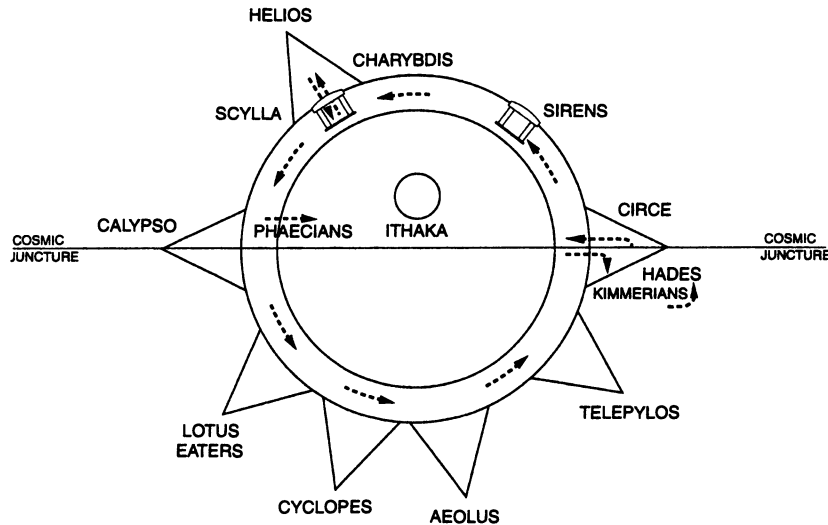


Figure 11.

path of darkness. Indeed her name “Ca-ly-pso” suggests concealing. In the *Odyssey* we read that Calypso’s island “lies far away in the sea” (*Od.* 7.245). Given the fact, however, that she is the daughter of Atlas, who, according to Hesiod, stands in the far West (*Od.* 1.52-54; *Hes. Theog.* 517-20; 746-48; 779), she must be also located at the western juncture.<sup>42</sup> Note that her isle is reached by Odysseus *immediately after the island of the sun*, which suggests that she is located at a cosmic juncture. The following postulates are possible, if we combine the information from the *Theogony* and the *Odyssey*:

1. The paths of day and night meet at the cosmic junctures.
2. The cosmic junctures are islands of two female goddesses, Calypso (West) and Circe (East).
3. The twin goddesses are reminiscent of Egyptian Nut, or better, Isis and Nephthys.
4. The West equals the house of night. This is where Atlas stands, according to Hesiod.

<sup>42</sup> Page 1972, 41; West 1997, 148.

5. The East equals the “house of dawn” (*Od.* 12.3-4).

6. The two cosmic junctures have a functional symmetry, because they have similar roles as regards the path of the sun. They are both gates or houses of the sun. Consider the expressions “house of dawn” (*Od.* 12.3-4), “house of night” (*Hes. Theog.* 758), and “gates of night” (Parmenides).

Let us explore also the vertical imagery of ascent/descent. Hesiod says that the sun ascends to the sky and descends from it (*Theog.* 761). It is also worth quoting the sun’s own speech in the *Odyssey*, when he threatens to go down into Hades and (presumably) stay there for good.<sup>43</sup> He complains to Zeus:

They have had the insolence to kill my cattle, the cattle that gave me such joy every day as I *climbed the sky* to put the stars to flight and as I dropped from heaven and sank once more to earth. If they do not repay me in full for my slaughtered cows, I *will go down* to Hades and shine among the dead. (*Od.* 12.379-383; transl. E.V. Rieu)

Mimnermus (frg. 12, West) and, after him, Stesichoros, describe the sun’s journey in a golden cup towards the depths of the night.<sup>44</sup> This is an image of descent into darkness. The prototype is obviously the Egyptian sun in his barque during his nocturnal trip, but there is also Near Eastern imagery of the sun travelling in a barque.<sup>45</sup>

By combining Hesiod and Homer, we can reconstruct a circular universe with two hemispheres and two cosmic junctures at the East and the West (Fig. 7). In each there is a house of Dawn and a house of Night with gates. At these points the paths of day and night meet. There is also a vertical axis: the sun ascends in the East and descends in the West. Note the flexible use of three interrelated concepts: “darkness,” “West” and “Hades.” The ghosts of the suitors *descend* into the darkness under the *West* (*Od.* 20.355 ff.).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Frame 1978, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Page 1972, 41-42.

<sup>45</sup> Hunger 1980-83, 222: sun boat attested on Akkadian seal.

<sup>46</sup> West 1997, 153.

There is a paradox however. Circe's island is in the vicinity of Hades because the hero reaches the underworld having passed Circe's island, and returns to Circe immediately after the trip to Hades. How can we reconcile the "House of Dawn" with the realm of Hades which must be at the West?

I shall argue that Circe's island is a "divided location": half of it is in the lower part of the hemisphere, the other half in the upper part (see Fig. 11). Compare with the description of the land of the Aethiopeans in *Odyssey*. They are the "most far away of all peoples" (ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν), says the poet. Half of them live where the sun sets, the rest where the sun rises (*Od.* 1.22-24). According to the cosmic map of Fig. 7, they live at a cosmic juncture where the two hemispheres of the cosmos meet.

If the kingdom of Hades is located at the end of the path of night, in the lower part of the hemisphere, it is the terminal path of night and close to dawn. Similarly Circe lives partly in the lower and partly in the upper part of the hemisphere.

Let us follow Odysseus's course. He arrives at Telepylos where, we are told, the paths of day and night are close. We suspect that he must be approaching the cosmic juncture. Then he reaches the island of Circe. We may imagine that half of her island is in that part of the circle which belongs to the path of night. But when Odysseus returns from the underworld, he comes to that part of the island which is located in the upper hemisphere, in the path of day. Circe's domain is therefore a divided location like the land of the Aethiopeans. As D. Frame suggested: "Circe's role in the *Odyssey* is both to usher the hero into the underworld and to receive him back again from it. When Odysseus and his men return to life and light, she is naturally equated with dawn."<sup>47</sup> The role of this goddess in *Odyssey* is similar to that of Nut. Nut is blamed by Geb for swallowing the sun, but she says in her defence that she also gives birth to him.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Frame 1978, 48.

<sup>48</sup> I owe this comment to O. Keel.

There is further evidence that Circe's island is a cosmic gate (compare with Fig. 5). Being a "neutral point," it is disorienting. "My friends," says Odysseus, "we do not know where East is, / Nor where the bright sun goes down under the earth, / Nor where he rises" (*Od.* 10.190).

Odysseus' journey begins in the lower half of the circle, the nocturnal world. He will reach the eastern cosmic juncture (Circe), he will eventually travel the path of the sun on the upper part of the circle making his terminal point the island of the sun. He will then come to the western cosmic juncture (Calypso) and return to the real world via the Phaeacians.

### 7. *Why Odysseus' Journey is Circular*

The first reference to Odysseus' location begins with Calypso, when the gods discuss the hero's whereabouts, in Olympus. Odysseus himself ends his narration with Calypso. The adventures thus begin with Calypso and end with Calypso. This narrative technique indirectly suggests a circular voyage (Fig. 11).

Another point in favour of a cyclical journey is the designation of many lands as being at the end of the world: The Cyclopes, the Phaeacians, not to mention Hades, lie at the edges of the cosmos. It is difficult to imagine Odysseus' journey as anything but a circular one. The geographical hints in the poem do not amount to a true picture of the known lands, as K. Meuli observed.<sup>49</sup>

I have constructed a map in the form of a circle, modelled on the Babylonian map of the seventh century B.C. (Figs. 6, 7 and 11). The world is encircled by a river. Based on the Babylonian map, I have reconstructed each mythical region as a triangle, with its base abutting the river-circumference of the circle. Those regions which are conceived as gates are embellished with a corresponding pictogram. This map of Odysseus' journey is a graphic illustration of the East Mediterranean conceptual cosmos of the Iron Age and Archaic Greek period (compare with Figs. 8-10).

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<sup>49</sup> Meuli 1974, 53 ff.

There is a certain symmetry in the arrangement of the places that Odysseus visits. The majority of regions are located in the lower half of the circle, the path of night. This accords well with the Egyptian model which emphasises the nocturnal journey since it is the more difficult one. After Odysseus leaves the island of Circe, following the "path of day," he encounters only a few obstacles. The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis have the function of guardians of "gates" to the island of the sun which constitutes the climax of his journey.

The adventures have a symmetrical structure based on the East-West axis, and the dichotomy of the dark and light parts of the hemisphere (Fig. 7).<sup>50</sup> We have already explored the significance of the pair of goddesses, Circe and Calypso. It has been often noticed that the two share many traits.<sup>51</sup> Both are enticing female goddesses, dangerous and alluring at the same time. Both point the way:<sup>52</sup> Circe leads Odysseus into Hades, Calypso leads him to the Phaeacians. Some scholars have designated Calypso as a goddess of death,<sup>53</sup> but Circe has a similar role, as we have seen.

The island of Helios has a symmetrical spatial relationship to Hades. Hades lies at the terminal point of the path of night, being located near Circe's "cosmic gate." Helios' own island is located at the end of the path of day, close to Calypso's island, the western cosmic juncture. Reaching Helios signifies the end of the journey; one cannot go much further. It is also the place where all men perish except Odysseus.

The Phaeacians are a category in themselves because they are an "interface" between the cosmic and human worlds.<sup>54</sup> On the one hand they represent life and normalcy, real institutions and family relationships. On the other hand, they too live at the edges of the world, they consort with the gods, they possess magic ships. The Phaeacian

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<sup>50</sup> For the analysis of the structure of the motifs: Hölscher, 1988.

<sup>51</sup> Most recently Crane 1988, 30-85; Cohen 1995, 165-174. That Circe and Calypso are duplicates is reviewed critically in Loudon 1999, 120 f.

<sup>52</sup> Strasburger 1998, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Meuli 1974, 73, with bibliography.

<sup>54</sup> Recently: Whittaker 1999, 144 ff.

ship which conveys Odysseus to the world of men must be destroyed (it is turned into stone). The journey is irreversible. The raft which brought Odysseus to Scherie is also destroyed: all vehicles to and from the Phaeacians must be annihilated for the cosmic journey cannot be undertaken twice.<sup>55</sup> Scherie itself is blocked off by mountains at Poseidon's wish. Neither Odysseus nor anyone else can ever re-enter the cosmic circle.

There are symmetries between the upper and lower parts of the circle. We meet with animals in both the cave of the Cyclops and the island of the sun. In both cases the animals are protected by their owners, although the cannibalistic taste of the Cyclops is not shared by the sun, who has beautiful girls tending his cattle. The Lotus eaters and the Sirens both tempt the heroes with detention; the former offer fruit, the latter knowledge.

In addition to symmetry there is also antithesis. It has already been mentioned that the first part of the journey has more episodes which relate to death and darkness: the dark cave of the Cyclops, the androphagous Laestrygonians, the oblivion offered by the Lotus eaters which resembles death,<sup>56</sup> can all be classified as stations towards Hades. It is also important to note that Odysseus must always continue in one direction. There is never a question of going back.<sup>57</sup>

#### 8. *The Course of the Journey*

The course of the travels is conceived of as a series of stations which take their toll on the company.<sup>58</sup> Odysseus starts with an entire fleet and ends up alone. The loss of men is successive; gradually all but Odysseus are eliminated. Some stations have the character of a gate and its inhabitants may be seen as symbolic guardians. Gates are both

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<sup>55</sup> Strasburger 1998, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Frame 1978, 37, cites Theognis who says that Persephone gives forgetfulness to mortals.

<sup>57</sup> Except in two instances: in the vicinity of the floating island of Aeolus, and when he leaves the island of the sun to pass once more through Scylla and Charybdis.

<sup>58</sup> Auffarth 1991, 276-85, sees the world of Odysseus's adventures as a reversed world.

entered and exited; Circe's island is to and from Hades and the rocks of Scylla and Charybdis constitute a gate to and from the isle of the sun. We have seen that gates and guardians are attested in both Near Eastern and Egyptian metaphysical journeys.

The first station is the Kikones, who are not mythical since they are located in Thrace. But then again, it is not uncommon to use real place names to designate mythical lands (the same applies to Kimmerians and the name "Artakye," which is located at Telepylos).<sup>59</sup> The company then is driven by the winds for 9 days (*Od.* 9.82) to the land of the Lotus Eaters. By now the cosmic circle has been entered for sure. The Lotus Eaters represent the danger of detention and oblivion. In this context it is worth noting that lotus flowers are offered to the dead in Egyptian funerary art. Hades also gives Persephone a fruit to detain her in the realm of death.

Next comes Cyclops. The most significant aspect of this episode for our purposes is the giant's cave which contains sheep.<sup>60</sup> Caverns are a feature of the sun's journey in the underworld, hence the designation of the Egyptian collection of texts known as "Book of Caverns."

Next, the floating island of Aeolus is reached. Due to the gift Aeolus gave Odysseus, a wine skin that contains all the winds, the company almost returns back to Ithaca after nine days of travel. But Odysseus's men in their folly open the bag and the winds are released with the result that they are driven back to Aeolus's island. The episode of Aeolus emphasises the extent of human folly. Had Odysseus's comrades been less greedy, they would have been spared further adventures and would have returned to Ithaca. But this was not to be.

The next station is reached after another six days (*Od.* 10.80). It is "Tele-pylos," a name which suggests a "far away gate",<sup>61</sup> namely the

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<sup>59</sup> Dickie 1995, 29-56.

<sup>60</sup> According to Burkert (1979, 88 ff.), animals in a cave conjure metaphysical, shamanistic associations; he even discusses the Paleolithic cave paintings in this connection.

<sup>61</sup> Page 1973, 35-37, denies this etymology but his arguments are not convincing.



Figure 12.

cosmic gate, the island inhabited by Circe. It is for this reason that the “paths of day and night” are close, as has already been stated above. At Telepylos there is a further loss of men and *all* ships are lost.

The next station is Circe and this adventure has already been commented on. Additional evidence comes from an image on a Corinthian *aryballos* that depicts Circe on her island (Fig. 12).<sup>62</sup> Circe and the Sirens are both watching the boat of Odysseus as it sails away from the island. Behind the island is a huge closed door. I believe it is the “House of Night,” as Hesiod calls it, or the “House of Dawn,” as it is called by Homer. The character of Circe reflects the function of her island. In the first part of the stay (or in that part of the island which is in the “path of night”), Circe is a destructive female consigning men to oblivion by turning them into pigs. These animals have chthonic connotations for the Greeks, who associated them with Persephone and the Underworld. Circe is inhospitable in another way. Instead of treating her guests to meat and wine, she instead gives them food for the dead.<sup>63</sup> Like the Egyptian goddess Nut who swallows the sun, she is capable of destroying.<sup>64</sup> The same goddess, however, is transformed into a helper. When the men return from Hades to “the House of Dawn,” they will get crucial advice from Circe about the rest of the journey

<sup>62</sup> Vermeule 1979, 202-203, fig. 25, calls the gates Circe’s palace, with *phalloi* mounted at the corner; Brilliant 1995, 171-172, calls it a loom; also cf. F. Canciani, “Kirke,” *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, VI, p. 56, no. 53.

<sup>63</sup> Marinatos 1995, 133-140; Strasburger 1998, 12 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Bonnet 1952, 537.

(*Od.* 12.25-26). Located between two opposites, the upper world and the underworld, she embodies the very polarity of her island. Calypso embodies the same polarity.

I would like to dwell a little longer on the path of Odysseus towards Hades. After leaving the island of Circe, the world gets progressively darker: E.V. Rieu translates “With a taut sail [the ship] forged ahead all day, *till the sun went down* and left her to pick her way through the darkness” (*Od.* 11.11-12). The translator is a careful one, yet his rendering of the Greek *δύσετό τ’ ἥελιος* (*Od.* 11.12) does not convey the dramatic finality of the sun’s setting. The Greek text implies that this particular diving of the sun is an unusual one. It is not a statement which conveys only the time of day, but expresses the irreversibility of death. Indeed, the company does not see the sun again. They come to frontiers of the world, the end of the Ocean, where the land of the Kimmerians is located. These peoples always live in darkness, in a perpetual mist. The rays of the sun do not penetrate and the sky is not visible: “For dreadful night has spread her mantle over the heads of the unhappy folk” (*Od.* 11.13-19). From this point on, the comrades will travel in darkness. Therefore, the Kimmerians are not in the “dark north,” as is usually assumed; they are very close to the end of the “path of night,” the place where the world is at its darkest since this realm is adjacent to Hades. Compare with the journey of the sun in Egyptian thought:

The distant regions of heaven lie in perpetual darkness,  
Their borders unknown to the south, north, west and east.  
These directions are exhausted in the primeval waters,  
Where the rays of the *ba* [of the sun god] do not pierce, . . .  
Where there is no light.<sup>65</sup>

In the *Odyssey*, the sun will rise only when the men return to the island of Circe “at the house of Dawn” (*Od.* 12.8). The company has followed the sun in his death and now has returned to the light.

After leaving Circe’s island, the men tread the “path of day” towards the island of the sun which constitutes the penultimate station of

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<sup>65</sup> Book of Nut, 19th Dynasty: Hornung 1990, 74.

the journey. Yet, before they get there, Odysseus and his remaining men have to pass more obstacles. The first of these is the island of the Sirens. What is the function of these monsters? As Sir Denys Page noted long ago, there is no evidence that the Sirens ate their victims, since the flesh still clings on the bodies of the unfortunate dead decomposing on the island. The Sirens kill indirectly by enticing humans with the knowledge they have to offer (*Od.* 12.189-190). The victims, having become prisoners of enchantment, are presumably eaten by vultures. On the Corinthian *aryballos* (above Fig. 12), the sirens are watching as the vultures are about to attack Odysseus and his men. The vase painter has expressed the manner of death with which the Sirens threaten Odysseus and his comrades, namely they will be eaten by vultures on the dry island. That the Sirens are guardians of the path that leads to the isle of the sun, is suggested by the imagery on a late Archaic *stamnos*, now in the British Museum (Fig. 13). It depicts two Sirens, each perched on a rock between which the ship must sail, whilst a third one attacks. Here, the iconography unambiguously conveys the concept of the dangerous passage defined by the two rocks.<sup>66</sup> In this section of his voyage, Odysseus will no longer encounter cannibals, but he will confront dangerous non-human guardians. The knowledge that the Sirens offer fits well the genre of the cosmic journey.

The next danger is Scylla and Charybdis. The monsters are perched on rocks exactly as the Sirens of Fig. 13; the passage between them is a kind of gate.<sup>67</sup> There is another point here. The passage has to be traversed not once but twice. As in the case of Circe's island, which leads to and from Hades, the straits of Scylla and Charybdis lead to and from the island of the sun. It can thus be suggested that the monsters guard access to the island of the sun. Danger of death lurks even there, but death is totally due to human folly: the isle of the sun is the place

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<sup>66</sup> Reeder 1995, 417, no. 137A.

<sup>67</sup> This is the function of the *plaktai*, the smashing rocks which play a role in the *Argonautica*, but which Odysseus avoids following Circe's advice.



Figure 13.

of the ultimate test. Odysseus, who is self-disciplined, passes the test unharmed; the rest perish.

After another nine days Odysseus arrives at Calypso's island of "darkness."<sup>68</sup> As we have seen, she is located at the western cosmic juncture and she leads Odysseus to the Phaeacians who make his re-entry into the real world possible.

The Phaeacian land is a place of transit. It is located between the cosmic circle and the real world. Odysseus has to arrive there naked, and Leukothea, who helps him survive the wreck of his raft, demands that her white veil be given back. Thus, he arrives without the vehicle which conveys him and without his clothes. He is a new man and all the material objects which link him to the cosmic journey have been left behind, except his memories. This tale is not unique to the *Odyssey*. Scherie has been compared to a similar station in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* by G. Strasburger.<sup>69</sup> In the aforementioned epic, the hero arrives at the island of the wise man Utnapishtim who lives at the edge

<sup>68</sup> Vernant 1986, 54-64; Vermeule 1979, 179 ff. Vernant thinks the name signifies that the goddess veils Odysseus by taking him out of circulation, as it were. I prefer the explanation of Frame 1978, 73, that Calypso refers to darkness.

<sup>69</sup> Strasburger 1998, 18.

of the world. Gilgamesh leaves this island but there is no possibility of him ever returning there. Likewise, the Phaeacians convey Odysseus from the fringes of the world into Ithaca, but no one can ever return to Scherie. The journey takes place at night by a magic boat while the hero is asleep; its path is neither traceable nor memorable. The journey is irreversible in two ways: the raft that takes Odysseus to Scherie is destroyed, and the same happens to the ship that conveys him from Scherie to Ithaca.

#### 9. *Why the journeys of Gilgamesh and Odysseus are Similar*

I have proposed above a circular journey for Odysseus, based on the cyclical path of the sun. The Egyptian cycle is based on hours: twelve for the night and twelve for the day; this gives a total of twenty-four hours. If the circle is divided into eight segments by four intersecting axes, then each segment of the circumference of the circle represents three units. One quarter of the circle contains six units; half the circle contains twelve units etc. Thus we have multiples of three: six, nine, twelve, twenty-four. These are precisely the units describing the advance of Odysseus and Gilgamesh respectively.<sup>70</sup> The eight segments correspond to the eight *nagu* on the Babylonian cosmic map.

There is good evidence that Gilgamesh undertakes a cosmic journey. He travels 12 leagues from Mt. Mashu to the island of Utnapishtim (IX-XI Tournay and Schaffer), thus completing exactly half the circle. We are told that he follows the path of the sun (*harran shamsi*) until sunrise (east), at the end of the earth.<sup>71</sup> He starts at Mt. Mashu, which is described as a mountain of sunrise and sunset with a peak that extends upward to the firmament and a base resting in the underworld. The mountain is a cosmic juncture and it will be remembered that, in Greek thought, the paths of day and night meet at cosmic junctures.

<sup>70</sup> For discussion and bibliography on the similarities of Greek and Near Eastern epic, see Burkert 1999b, 3-34.

<sup>71</sup> Gilg. XI, iv (Pritchard) "a distant journey as the sun rises"; discussion in Horowitz 1998, 96 ff.

The expression “mountain of sunrise and sunset” in *Gilgamesh* comes very close indeed to the Greek expression “paths of day and night.” If my model is correct, Gilgamesh starts his journey in the West. Indeed he travels 12 leagues *in darkness*, exactly as we would expect. Progressively he approaches the land of sunrise: at the end of the *eleventh league*, dawn approaches; at the end of the *twelfth league* the sun has risen.<sup>72</sup> Compare with *Odyssey* 12.1-9, where Odysseus approaches Circe’s island the second time after his trip to the underworld and witnesses the sunrise. Gilgamesh then reaches a grove with trees full of fruit and gems. There he meets Sidouri, the ale wife. The latter has been likened to Circe,<sup>73</sup> and the grove is reminiscent of the lush islands of both Circe and Calypso.

The meaning of the region of darkness has caused scholars some worry. “It is not clear why the sun does not shine along the path of the sun,” says E. Horowitz.<sup>74</sup> In the model proposed above, the darkness is explained by the fact that Gilgamesh follows the “path of night,” and, of course, the sun travels through both the region of darkness and the path of light. By completing twelve leagues, Gilgamesh has accomplished the most difficult part of the journey and reaches the island of Utnapishtim in the East.<sup>75</sup>

It will be remembered that in the Egyptian model, the twelve hours of the night are the difficult ones and replete with obstacles. We note here the importance of the number twelve as corresponding to exactly half the circle.

In the *Odyssey*, the Greek hero goes on to complete the 24 units of the circle; he re-enters Ithaca only after he has reached Calypso in the West. Consider the following numbers: as in *Gilgamesh*, so also in *Odyssey* distance is measured by units of three. Odysseus travels nine days to reach the Lotus Eaters. Nine days from Aeolus to Ithaca (which

<sup>72</sup> Gilg. IX, v. 381 ff.; Horowitz 1998, 98-99.

<sup>73</sup> West 1997, 409.

<sup>74</sup> Horowitz 1998, 99.

<sup>75</sup> Gilgamesh travels “as the sun rises” (IX, iv. 11). The east location is confirmed also by the story of the flood featuring Utnapishtim in the East: Horowitz 1998, 104.

does not count because he is driven back). Six days to Telepylos and nine days from Scylla/Charybdis to Calypso's island.  $9 + 6 + 9 = 24$ . Thus the numbers indicate that the journey of Odysseus completes a full circle. Numbers aside: it is noteworthy that Gilgamesh, Odysseus and the Argonauts follow a different route for their return journey. The pictorial rendition of the hero's journey on the Phoenician bowl from Praeneste (above Fig. 8) also depicts the journey as a full circle, with the return route being different from the departure route.

10. *Near Eastern and Egyptian Wisdom Literature: The Purpose of the Journey*

We must ask one final question. What is the meaning of the cosmic journey? If it is perceived as a series of trials through dangerous realms with successive loss of lives, the completion of the trip is not only an accomplishment in itself but it must leave its permanent mark on the hero. The pattern is modelled on the Egyptian underworld journey where dangers lurk but which can be overcome *if the right spells* are recited. If Odysseus has learned something by passing the tests, it is wisdom and self-restraint, rather than achievement of youth or immortality. Odysseus is, in fact, offered immortality by Calypso but he rejects it. His decision is evocative of Sidouri's advice to Gilgamesh in the homonymous epic:

The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find  
 When the Gods created mankind  
 Death for mankind they set aside . . .  
 Thou, Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly  
 Make thou merry by day and by night . . .  
 Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom  
 For this is the task of [mankind] (Tablet IX, iii = Pritchard 1973, 64)

Thus, Odysseus learns about his human identity and its limits. Note that the mistakes of insolence which Odysseus commits in the first half of the journey, especially in the Cyclops incident, are avoided in the second half. Indeed, Odysseus does not touch the cattle of the sun, whereas he had less respect for the property of Cyclops. Perhaps

he learns from Teiresias, exactly half way through his journey to the underworld.<sup>76</sup>

That there is a “moralistic” tone and a mystical aspect to the voyages of Odysseus has not gone unnoticed.<sup>77</sup> Today there are new grounds for detecting this aspect since the discovery of a graffito on a black crater found in Olbia. It reproduces a verse from the *Odyssey* with the exact wording of Odysseus as he relates the beginning of his voyage 9.39: “From Ilium, the wind drove me to the Kikones . . .” The crater has been connected with other Orphic texts.<sup>78</sup> The idea of an Orphic Odysseus is beginning to take shape.

The above does not mean that the *Odyssey* is a mystical text. Nor does its composition reflect different layers put together as a loosely woven patchwork.<sup>79</sup> Rather, it is a poem written by one poet and its perfect structure and unity can serve as a model for any novelist. What has been argued here is that the raw material is based on a tradition different from that of the Troy cycle. This tradition circulated in the Mediterranean long before the poem which has been handed down to us was composed. This common cultural tradition of the hero’s travels around the universe I have termed here “the cosmic journey.”

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<sup>76</sup> Utnapishtim in *Gilgamesh* and Teiresias have something in common: an experience of life and death which enables them to have a perspective.

<sup>77</sup> Proposed by Ganschinietz in Pauly-Wissowa’s *Real-Encyclopädie* 10: 2362, 2401, but criticized and rejected by Meuli 1974, 27-30.

<sup>78</sup> Dettori 1996, 299-300. I am grateful to A. Chaniotis and W. Burkert for bringing this article to my attention.

<sup>79</sup> The bibliography on the *Odyssey* is immense. Recent works: Heubeck, West, and Hainsworth 1988-92; Latacz 1991; Kullmann 1992; Crielaard 1995; Morris and Powell 1997.

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## EXCLUSIONS FROM THE CATECHUMENATE: CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY WITH PAGAN CULT?

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### *Summary*

This paper looks at the categories of person that two Christian documents, the *Traditio apostolorum* and Book 8 of the *Constitutiones apostolorum*, that belong respectively to the 3rd and later 4th centuries AD, propose be excluded from the catechumenate, apparently on the ground that the callings they follow make them morally-unfit. It asks whether that was the only reason for their exclusion and suggests that the prejudice from which such callings as performing on the stage and charioteering suffered in Roman society was also a factor. The paper then goes on to ask whether these exclusions from the catechumenate in their concern with moral fitness represent a radical new departure from anything to be found in pagan cult and whether we should continue to subscribe to the widely-held belief that pagan cult is not concerned with the moral state of the worshipper, but only with the punctilious performance of the ritual by persons not defiled by recent sexual contact or by the death of a close relative. It concludes that there is no discontinuity and that moral unworthiness could well be a source of concern in pagan cult.

### *Introduction*

This paper owes its existence to a statement made at a recent conference that was intentionally designed to provoke discussion.<sup>1</sup> What was said was that Early Christianity conspicuously differed from pagan cult in excluding from the catechumenate as morally unworthy and unfit persons pursuing certain practices and following certain callings. This paper is a response to that assertion. Three points will be made: 1) the Christian Church does not stand apart from pagan society, but is influenced in its view of who is worthy to enter its doors by the larger society of which it is part; 2) some pagan cults

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Polymnia Athassiadi for reading an earlier draft of this paper and for her generosity in drawing my attention to passages I had overlooked.

from at least the 4th century BC sought to exclude from participation in their rituals persons thought to be morally unfit; 3) the categories of person excluded from the catechumenate to some extent coincide with the types of person not welcome in pagan sanctuaries. The general conclusion to which the paper looks is that we are mistaken in continuing to ignore the moral element in pagan cult and in supposing that there is no continuity between Christian religious practices and pagan cult.<sup>2</sup> It will be suggested at the end of the paper that our view of pagan cult has been influenced by Christian apologetic and that Christian apologetic is an unreliable guide to what the pagan gods were believed to look for in their worshippers.

#### *Exclusions from the Catechumenate*

There are two main sources of information about the types of person to be excluded from the catechumenate: they are the *Traditio apostolorum* (henceforth *Traditio*) and Book 8 of the *Constitutiones apostolorum* (henceforth *Constitutiones*).<sup>3</sup> The *Traditio* perhaps belongs to the 3rd century AD and underlies the apostolic canons in Book 8 of the *Constitutiones*, which are from the 380's.<sup>4</sup> The latter work contains a more precise and detailed set of exclusions.<sup>5</sup> The *Traditio* requires that inquiry be made into the works and callings of those to be catechized. Those who keep or provide women for prostitution are either to desist from the practice or be sent away. The same holds good for sculptors or painters of images; also anyone who performs on stage. As for one who teaches boys, it would be better that he desist, but if

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brown 1999:173-74 for criticism of the tendency to exaggerate the difference between Greek religion and biblical religion. For a correction of the view that Christianity is monotheistic and paganism polytheistic, see Athanassiadi and Frede 1999:1-20.

<sup>3</sup> The *Traditio*, originally written in Greek, exists only in Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic versions and in part in Latin (Botte 1984:18-19; Bradshaw 1992:89-91).

<sup>4</sup> It is proper to suspend judgment on the date of composition of the document. That it was written around AD 215 in Rome by Hippolytus is far from clear (Bradshaw 1992:90-92).

<sup>5</sup> Schwartz 1963:270-71.

he has no other skill, he is to be allowed to enter the catechumenate. The same leniency is not allowed gladiators and those who train them, those who hunt down wild beasts in the arena, public officials charged with the running of gladiatorial shows, priests of idols or keepers of idols. Soldiers in whose power it is to execute a man are not to do so or be rejected. Those with the power to execute or the magistrate of a city who wears purple are to be rejected, unless they resign. Prostitutes, male invert, eunuchs and those who perform unspeakable actions are to be rejected, since they are impure. Magicians are not to be examined at all. Performers of incantations, astrologers, diviners, interpreters of dreams, those who gather crowds around them and the makers of protective amulets are either to desist or be rejected. A concubine who is a slave and has children by a man to whom she loyally adheres is to hear the word, but if these conditions are not fulfilled, she is to be rejected. A man who has a concubine is either to give her up or marry her according to the law or be rejected (16).

The comparable section in Book 8 of the *Constitutiones* clearly derives from the *Traditio*, but shows some differences. It begins with the keeper of prostitutes (*pornoboskos*) who is either to desist from selling his wares or be turned away; the same applies to prostitutes (*pornai*), to makers of images, to those from the theatre, whether male or female, charioteers, gladiators, one who runs the stade (*stadiodromos*), functionaries charged with running games or *ludi* (*loudempistai*), Olympics (*Olympikoi*), those accompanying choruses on pipes (*choraulai*), players on the kithara, lyre-players, those who put on displays of dance, tavern-keepers (*kapeloi*). A soldier who wishes to enter is not to do wrong, make false accusations and is to be content to live on his allowance. One who engages in unmentionable practices, one who is a sodomite, a fool (*blax*), a magician (*magos*), an utterer of incantations (*epaoidos*), an astrologer, adiviner (*mantis*), a snake-charmer (*theropodos*),<sup>6</sup> a gatherer of crowds about himself, a maker of amulets, a purifier, an interpreter of birds, an expert on signs, an interpreter of

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<sup>6</sup> Funk 1905:537 translates the word by '*captator carminum magicorum*,' that is, 'one who seeks out spells'; Lampe, *Greek Patristic Lexicon* s.v. more correctly gives

palpitations, one who is on the look out for distortions of the face or feet when encountered and for weasels, chance utterances, words overheard of meaningful significance is to be subject to long scrutiny, since his vice is hard to eradicate, but if he desists to be accepted. A concubine who is a slave of an unbeliever is to be accepted, unless she engages in licentious behaviour with others. A believer, if he has a concubine who is a slave, must cease from this relationship and marry her according to the law; if she is a free woman, he should do the same; otherwise, he is to be rejected. Someone who pursues Hellenic or Jewish practices should change his ways or be rejected; similarly one who is mad on the theatre or hunts in the amphitheatre or horse-racing or contests (32.6-15).

There are in both documents roughly speaking five categories of person to be excluded from the catechumenate, if they do not change their ways: those engaged in sexual relationships outside of marriage; those making a living from sexual encounters; sexual deviants; those whose living comes from public performances or who allow their lives to be closely bound up with such performances; and those who are magicians or diviners, although the last-named are to be subject to stricter scrutiny. There are, of course, persons who do not fall into any of these categories such as teachers, soldiers and image-makers.<sup>7</sup>

That justification for any given exclusion could be found in Christian Scripture or in the teaching of the Church is not to be doubted. Appeal could be made, for instance, to the notion that the games in the circus and performances on the stage were the work of the Devil or that they constituted idolatry, to justify the exclusion of charioteers and

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'a charmer of wild beasts,' but the parallel he cites from Thdt. *Ps.* 57.6 makes 'snake-charmer' virtually certain.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the exclusions are reiterated in canons of councils of the Church: *Canon* 62 of the council of Elvira (before AD 314) insists that charioteers and pantomimes who wish to be admitted as believers should give up their arts; the Council of Arles (AD 314) speaks of keeping charioteers and those connected with the theatre apart from the community, so long as they continue to practise their calling (*Canons* 4 and 5).

performers on the stage.<sup>8</sup> The opposition of the Fathers of the Church to the theatre and the games from the 2nd century onwards is well documented.<sup>9</sup> But was that all that lay behind the exclusions? If the theatre and the games in the circus had in the minds of Christians such close associations with pagan cult, why were the magistrates who sponsored and paid for games not mentioned amongst those who were not to be admitted to the catechumenate? Why was it only the lowly charioteers, gladiators, participants in wild-beast hunts and those who eagerly attended the circus, theatre and the amphitheatre who are mentioned?

Relevant here are two stories in Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* about miracles performed by that saint. The earlier is about a charioteer from Gaza who was struck by a demon while driving a chariot and became totally stiff and thus unable to move his hands or bend his neck; he was brought on a litter to Hilarion, who told him that he would not be healed, until he came to believe in Jesus and promised to renounce his former craft; he gave his belief, promised and was healed (9.4-6).<sup>10</sup> The second story is about a Christian citizen of Gaza, Italicus, who wished to enter a chariot-team at the games called the *Consualia* against the horses trained by a magistrate of Gaza, a *duumvir*; the magistrate was a worshipper of the local god, Marna; Italicus was at something of a disadvantage, since his opponent had in his service a magician, able to slow down the horses of opponents and to cause his own horses to hurry on; Italicus, accordingly, approached Hilarion for help; Hilarion thought it was silly to waste time on such nonsense and smilingly suggested that Italicus should divert the money he was spending on horses to the poor to save his own soul, to which Italicus replied that it was part of his public duty and that it was not so much that he wished to perform it as that he was compelled to do so and that it was impossible

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<sup>8</sup> Baumeister 1987:115-16 assumes that this is what lies behind the exclusion of actors and charioteers.

<sup>9</sup> For the teaching of the Fathers of the Church from Aristides to John Chrysostom on the theatre, see Schnusenberg 1981:27-43.

<sup>10</sup> The demonic assault was presumably caused by a magical spell intended to keep the charioteer from winning.

for a Christian to have recourse to magic, but that he wanted help from a servant of Christ against the people of Gaza, who were adversaries of God and mocked not so much him as the Church of Christ; Hilarion now backed down and gave Italicus holy water with which to sprinkle the horses, the stable, the chariots and the starting-gate; as a result Italicus' team was victorious (11.3-11).

There is a double standard at work here: the charioteer has to renounce his craft completely, but Italicus, a member of the curial class, is treated in a much more indulgent fashion by the saint. It is true that Italicus only reluctantly performs the duties that fall to him as a member of the curial class, but he still performs them and Hilarion is more than understanding. The existence of the double standard is an indication that there were factors at work in determining who was to be excluded from the catechumenate besides a desire to eradicate institutions associated with pagan cult.

It is the case that several of the categories of person excluded from the catechumenate suffered from severe disabilities in Roman civil life and were the object of deep-seated prejudices. Men who kept prostitutes, those who appeared on the stage and charioteers, *venatores* and gladiators belonged in Roman law to the category of persons of bad repute called *famosi*, *infames* or *ignominiosi*.<sup>11</sup> From a legal standpoint that meant they did not have recourse to certain remedies at law; socially, it meant that they formed an excluded class by themselves. What the various origins of the prejudices affecting these persons were need not concern us. The prejudices were, however, clearly in existence before the legal disabilities came into force. So far as actors, charioteers and *venatores* go, the principle enunciated in law that made them *infames* is that they had entered contests for the sake of gain or had appeared on stage to earn money.<sup>12</sup> That principle served to

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<sup>11</sup> On the social status of actors in Rome from the Republic down to the Late Empire, see Warnecke 1914.

<sup>12</sup> Dig. 3.2.2.5: *eos enim qui quaestus causa in certamina descendunt et omnes propter praemia in scaenam prodeuntes famosos esse Pegasus et Nerva filius responderunt.*

distinguish them from the athletes and performers who competed in sacred games for the sake merely of winning honour.<sup>13</sup> It was not only those whose main income came from providing prostitutes (*lenones*) who were treated as *infames*; tavern-keepers (*cauponae*), innkeepers (*stabularii*) and attendants in the baths (*balneatores*) suffered the same penalty, if they provided prostitutes, as they will very often have done (*Dig.* 3.2.4.2).

The fact that the Church excluded persons of low social standing connected with the stage, amphitheatre and circus from its ranks and placed no obstacles in the way of men and women of high social status who paid for these forms of entertainment is reason to suspect that the prejudices affecting such persons in pagan Roman society and law carried over into the Church and played a part in determining who was to be admitted and who was not. The persons excluded in the *Traditio* connected with the stage or with games (*ludi*) are all persons of low social status. In the *Constitutiones*, although the list is much longer and more detailed, the persons excluded are also on the whole humble, but there are two possible exceptions: they are the runner in the stade (*stadiodromos*) and the person referred to as the *Olympikos*. It is natural to suppose that the latter was a competitor in the Olympic Games.<sup>14</sup> That is a possibility, since there is now evidence that Olympic Games were still being held in the second half of the 4th century. *Olympikos* may, on the other hand, be a technical term for a certain kind of musical performer. A *stadiodromos* would at first sight seem to be an amateur athlete, but this is not absolutely certain, since in Late Antiquity troupes of athletes who were essentially entertainers are to be found performing in the hippodrome.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Dig.* 3.2.3 pr.: *athletas autem Sabinus et Cassius responderunt omnino artem ludicram non facere: virtutis enim gratia hoc facere et generaliter ita omnes opinantur et utile videtur, ut neque thymelici neque xystici neque agitadores nec qui aquam spargunt ceterasque eorum ministeria, qui certaminibus sacris deserviunt ignominiosi habeantur.*

<sup>14</sup> Baumeister 1987:116 renders it 'Olympiakämpfer.'

<sup>15</sup> See Cameron 1976:213-14 on a programme for games in the hippodrome at Oxyrhynchus in the 6th century (*POxy* 2707).

*Exclusions from Pagan Cult: Background*

A comparison of the exclusionary policies followed by pagan cults with those practiced by the Christian Church means drawing a comparison between different forms of exclusion. Exclusion from a cult generally means physical exclusion from a shrine; it does not mean the denial of membership in a group of believers. There were restricted cult-groups to whose shrines there was no general admittance. Admission might be granted to those who qualified for membership by reason, for example, of birth. Then there were the mystery-cults into which men and women were initiated. Denial of initiation in a mystery-cult has more in common with being excluded from membership in the Christian Church. Even though being excluded from membership in the Christian Church was not quite the same thing as being denied entry to a pagan shrine or being turned away from initiation into a mystery-cult, a meaningful comparison can still be made between the criteria that pagan cults used to exclude undesirables from participation with those that on the evidence of the *Traditio* and the *Constitutiones* the Christian Church employed.

Before turning to the evidence for individual pagan cults excluding the morally-suspect from participation, it may be helpful to set these exclusionary policies in a larger context by looking at what is said in Greek and Roman literature about what the gods were imagined to expect of those who worshipped them. Sacrifice was at the heart of worship, which means that sacrifice almost invariably plays a part in discussion of worship. It almost goes without saying that different men will have adopted very different positions on the matter and that there will have been a good deal of inconsistency in the positions taken by individuals. While it is undoubtedly foolish to say that there was uniformity of opinion throughout pagan antiquity about the attitude the gods took to those who worshipped them, it remains the case that a certain view of the divine is consistently given expression. It is voiced in many different contexts, generally it is true by persons of a certain intellectual standing. The voice of the small man is not directly heard here, but if a character in a play takes the same view of piety, it is to

be presumed that his or her utterance must have struck a chord in the audience.

There is literary evidence that from the 5th century BC onwards the gods were believed to look with favour on those of their worshippers whose moral character was impeccable, however small the sacrifice they made. Xenophon in the *Memorabilia*, for example, credits Socrates with maintaining that it was not in the gods' interest that they should be better pleased with the large offerings of the wicked than the modest offerings of the good and secondly that life for men would be intolerable, if the offerings of the wicked pleased the gods better than those of the good; it was, accordingly, Socrates' belief that the gods took particular pleasure in the honours done them by those who were especially pious (1.3.3). It is clear from the context that for Xenophon moral probity lies at the heart of piety. Isocrates, for his part, in an exhortatory speech addressed to Nicocles, the king of Salamis in Cyprus, tells Nicocles to bear in mind that the fairest sacrifice and the greatest form of worship (*therapeia*) he can offer the gods is to make sure that in his approaches to them he shows himself to be a man of the highest moral character (*beltistos*) and irreproachable in his righteousness (*dikaiotatos*), since there is more hope that such a man will fare well at the hands of the gods than one who makes many sacrifices (*Ad Nic.* 20). The moral teaching of the speech is by and large made up of the commonplaces of Greek popular morality, which is to say that there is nothing very unusual or radical about the conduct Isocrates recommends to the king. There is, accordingly, some reason to think that Isocrates is voicing a commonplace in saying that moral uprightness constitutes the fairest form of worship that the gods can be given.

The word that Xenophon uses for being pious, *eusebes*, is used by a character in a lost play of Euripides, who says: "Know it well that if a man who is *eusebes* sacrifices to the gods, even if the sacrifice is small, he will be safe and sound" (fr. 946 N<sup>2</sup>). In another play of Euripides in which a character says that he has often observed that those paying a small sacrifice to the gods are more *eusebeis* than those sacrificing cattle, the word seems to have very much the same moral force (fr. 327.6-7 N<sup>2</sup>). In both instances, it looks as if *eusebes* has

the same meaning that it has for Xenophon's Socrates. It does not follow that because characters in plays declare that moral probity on the part of a worshipper counts for more in the eyes of the gods than the size of his sacrifice, everyone in the audience will have silently assented to these sentiments. No doubt some well-to-do men will have taken a rather different view of the relationship between wealth and sacrifice. Cephalus in Plato's *Republic* may be a case in point: he argues that one of the advantages of wealth for a man of high moral character (*epieikes*) who is disciplined (*kosmios*) is that he can depart for the afterlife in full confidence, since his wealth has enabled him to avoid having to deceive or lie to anyone and ensured his being able to perform the sacrifices that he owed to the gods and to pay off any debts he may have owed to his fellow-men (331a10-b5).

As for Plato himself, one of his concerns in both the *Republic* and the *Laws* is to combat the notion purveyed, according to one of the interlocutors in the *Republic*, by mendicant holy men (*agyrtaí*) and seers (*manteis*) that men were able to buy off the gods with gifts and prayers and clear themselves of the wrongs that they and their forebears had committed.<sup>16</sup> The implication of that position, as both the *Republic* and the *Laws* point out, is that the unjust will have an advantage over the just and that there will be no incentive to be just. Plato writes as if his readers will find the idea that sacrifice to the gods was in effect a bribe outrageous. That does not mean that in fact they will have done so, but it is a fair presumption that many people will have found the proposition shocking, once its implications had been spelled out.

Plato's positive teaching on the proper worship of the gods is to be found in the *Laws*. He begins his discussion by setting out the general principle that governs the response of the divine to all human actions: it is that the divine welcomes what is akin to itself, which means that man to the extent that he can make himself like the divine will be pleasing to it; the chaste and the just man will, accordingly, please the divine, since it itself has these qualities. The corollary of that general principle

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<sup>16</sup> *Resp.* 364b5-67a4; *Leg.* 906b3-907b4.

is that in the matter of prayers, sacrifices, offerings and worship as a whole the good man (*agathos*) has the best, fairest and most direct prospect of a prosperous life, while the prospects of a bad man (*kakos*) are the opposite of these. Plato then defines what it is to be impure (*akathartos*) and pure (*katharos*) in soul: the former is to be *kakos*; the latter is to be *agathos* (716c1-e2).

The gods are not only believed to look with particular favour on the sacrifices of the righteous, however small these may be, they are also credited with appearing in epiphanies only to those whom they love (*theophileis*).<sup>17</sup> What recommends a man to the gods is above all the goodness of his character.<sup>18</sup> Thus Callimachus says quite explicitly that Apollo shows himself only to good men (*esthloi*) and that those who do see the god benefit from the sight (*Hym.* 2.9-11).

Turning from Greece to Rome, we find that Roman authors, beginning with Cicero, take exactly the same view of what the gods look for in those who pay them worship as the Greek authorities cited. There are two main discussions in Cicero, both written late in his life, of what constitutes the proper worship of the gods.<sup>19</sup> That in *On the Laws* (*De Legibus*) is longer than that in *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De Natura Deorum*). In the latter work, Cicero gives a definition of how the gods are best worshipped: "The best, purest, holiest and most pious form of the worship of the gods consists in their being worshipped with a pure, wholesome and undefiled mind and voice" (2.71).<sup>20</sup> Essentially the same position is taken in *On the Laws*, though at rather greater length; there is besides a discussion of the greater importance of purity of mind over ritual bodily purity and of how much more difficult it is to dissolve a stain on the conscience than an impu-

<sup>17</sup> Pfister 1924:319-20.

<sup>18</sup> Hdt. 1.87.2; Xen. *Cyn.* 13.17, *Cyr.* 4.1.6.

<sup>19</sup> There is a further brief reference based on the teaching of the Stoic Panaetius at *Off.* 2.71: *deos placatos pietas efficiet et sanctitas*.

<sup>20</sup> *cultus autem deorum est optimus idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper pura, integra, incorrupta et mente et voce veneremur.*

rity on the body (2.24).<sup>21</sup> The law that Cicero proposes be followed in the worship of the divine contains a clause requiring that moral probity be brought to bear in their worship, and that money be kept out of the picture (*pietatem adhiberi; opes amoveri*). His explanation of the intent of the law is that poverty should not deprive a man of access to the worship of the gods (2.25). The rich and the poor are then to have equal access to the divine, a position that is implied in the teaching of Euripides, Isocrates and Xenophon.

The satirist Persius has a lengthy treatment of the corrupting influence of wealth on the way in which the gods are worshipped and on the barrier excessive sacrifices in fact set up between men and gods (2.41-75). What men should bring to the temples of the gods is a mind in which attention to right and duty are conjoined, a spirit utterly imbued with piety and a breast steeped in what is noble and honorable; with these qualities present a sacrifice of a little grain is quite enough (73-75).<sup>22</sup> It is true that Persius was influenced by Stoicism, but there is no reason to suppose that he is preaching here from a specifically Stoic perspective.

The same cannot be said of Seneca: his prescription for the proper worship of the gods is very much that of a philosopher influenced by the characterization of the nature of the divine to be found in Plato's *Timaeus*. There, the Divine Demiurge is said to be by nature utterly good (*agathos*), which for Plato means that there is no grudging, envious or jealous element in him; since he is completely free of that element in his nature, the Divine Demiurge wished to create man in his own likeness (29d7-e3). Belief in the gods is for Seneca the beginning of their worship, followed by rendering them the respect that is their due majesty and then displaying goodness; without the last element

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<sup>21</sup> *caste iubet lex adire ad deos, animo videlicet in quo sunt omnia; nec tollit castimoniam corporis, sed hoc oportet intellegi, quom multum animus corpori praestet, observeturque ut casto corpore adhibeantur, multo esse in animis id servandum magis. nam illud vel aspersione aquae vel dierum numero tollitur, animi labes nec diuturnitate evanescere nec amnibus ullis elui potest.*

<sup>22</sup> *compositum ius fasque animo sanctosque recessus / mentis et incoctum generoso pectus honesto. / haec cedo ut admoveam templis et farre litabo.*

being present, the gods cannot be given the respect that is their due.<sup>23</sup> Seneca sums up all of this in the apophthegm: "Be good. Whoever imitates the gods, does them sufficient worship."<sup>24</sup>

The testimony of Persius and Seneca can always be discounted as that of men influenced by philosophy. It is less easy to dismiss Pliny the Younger and to say that the sentiments he expresses in the *Panegyric* for the Emperor Trajan did not reflect a widely-held view of the divine. In that speech, Pliny declares that he is confident that the Emperor will not imagine he is ungrateful, if he expresses himself less than adequately, since he had noticed that the gods themselves do not rejoice so much in the precision of the prayers of those worshipping them as they do in innocence and piety and that he who brings a pure and undefiled mind to their shrines is more pleasing to them than one who brings a well-polished song (3.5).<sup>25</sup> Pliny adapts to make it fit the special circumstances of his speech what must have been a commonplace well-known to his hearers about the preference of gods for pureness of mind over rich sacrifices and punctiliousness in carrying out the rituals of worship.

*Exclusion of the Morally-Unsound from Places of Worship: Literary Testimony*

There are grounds then for thinking that throughout much of pagan antiquity there was a pervasive underlying feeling that the gods

<sup>23</sup> Ep. 95.50: *primus est deorum cultus deos credere; deinde reddere illis maiestatem suam, reddere bonitatem sine qua nulla maiestas est*. For belief in the power of the deity as a necessary constituent of its proper worship, cf. Apul. *Metam.* 11.16: *felix hercules et ter beatus, qui vitae scilicet praecedentis innocentia fideque meruerit tam praeclarum de caelo patrociniū, ut renatus quodam modo statim sacrorum obsequio desponderetur*.

<sup>24</sup> *vis deos propitiare? bonus esto. satis illos coluit quisquis imitatus est*. Cf. Sen. fr. 123 Haase: *non immolationibus et sanguine multo colendum . . . sed mente pura, bono honestoque proposito*.

<sup>25</sup> *animadverto enim etiam deos ipsos non tam accuratis adorantium precibus quam innocentia et sanctitate laetari, gratioremque existimari, qui delubris eorum puram castamque mentem quam qui meditatum carmen intulerit*.

expected moral probity in those who worshipped them. It is to be presumed that the regulations placed at the entrance to temples excluding persons who are morally-compromised from entering a shrine owe their existence to such a feeling. That the feeling was a factor governing the way in which entry to shrines was regulated emerges more clearly from anecdotes in the literary record and from the poetry of Early Imperial Rome than it does from anything inscribed on stone.<sup>26</sup> The two different forms of source nonetheless complement each other.

Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (henceforth VA) tells a story about the young Apollonius, during his sojourn at the temple of Asclepius in Aegeae in Cilicia, advising the priest in charge of the sanctuary not to receive into the shrine a rich Cilician who wished Asclepius to restore sight to one of his eyes. Apollonius had seen both the altar awash in the blood of the sacrifices the man had made and offerings of gold vessels embellished with precious stones. The reason that Apollonius gives for suggesting the priest take such a course of action is that the man is foul (*miaros*) and that the cause of the ill he had suffered was a base action on his part. Apollonius' premonition about the man is confirmed by a dream that the priest experiences in which Asclepius tells him to send the man away with everything he had brought with him, since the fellow deserved to lose his other eye. On inquiry, the priest learned that the man had lost his eye, after his wife had discovered him in bed with her daughter by a previous marriage. The man was duly driven away. Apollonius, for his part, was moved to philosophize on making sacrifices and offerings to the gods. His teaching on the subject was that someone who came to a shrine of a god conscious that his conduct had been good might reasonably pray that the gods should pay him what he was owed, since benefits are owed to the pious (*hosioi*) and their opposite to those of bad character (*phauloi*); the gods, therefore, treat well those who are free of the disease of wickedness and unwounded by it and send them on their

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<sup>26</sup> The Latin literary evidence for moral purity as a requirement for those approaching the divine is collected by Appel 1909:186-87.

way garlanding them not with gold crowns but with all benefits, while they leave to justice to take care of those on whom they see the tattoo-marks of criminality and corruption; their wrath is in fact that much greater, if those who are not pure (*katharoi*) have dared to enter their sanctuaries (1.11).<sup>27</sup>

Philostratus in the VA describes a number of incidents in which Apollonius is himself either excluded from a sanctuary or arrested there and held bound, because he is suspected of being a magician. When he comes to Eleusis to be initiated in the mysteries, the hierophant does not wish to admit him to the rites, declaring that he would not initiate a sorcerer (*goes*) and would not open Eleusis to a man who was not pure (*katharos*) in matters relating to the divine. When Apollonius' robust response to the hierophant wins the crowd to his side, the hierophant, seeing that he will not have the crowd with him, if he bars Apollonius, offers to initiate him (4.18). The priests of the oracle of Trophonius in Lebadeia in Boeotia, on the other hand, invent excuses to prevent Apollonius consulting the oracle, but tell the crowd that they would never let a sorcerer (*goes*) question the oracle. In the event, Apollonius waits until evening, when presumably the priests have left, tears up four obelisks that controlled access to the entrance and descends into the cave to consult the god (8.19). Finally, there is the incident at the very end of Apollonius' life when the holy man comes at dead of night to the shrine of Dictynna on Cretan Mount Ida and is arrested by those in charge of the shrine as a sorcerer (*goes*) and thief, precisely because the fierce dogs who guarded the sanctuary had not barked at his approach, but had shown him greater affection than even these they knew (8.30).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> On the tattooing of criminals, see Jones 1987:148-49.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Aul. Gell. 6.1.6 for a similar story about Scipio Africanus neither being barked at nor attacked by the dogs when at the end of the night before the light broke he entered the Capitolium, although these same dogs were savage brutes when they dealt with others. Weinreich 1929:297 takes the fawning of the dogs to be evidence that they recognize the divine in Apollonius and refers to his own discussion of the topic in Weinreich 1928:174-85. The *topos* of dogs in a sanctuary fawning on someone, to

The great Antiochean teacher of rhetoric of the second half of the 4th century AD, Libanius, in a speech set in the 5th century BC makes the point that if someone who was morally-tainted forced his way into a sanctuary, getting beyond the basins containing purificatory water (*perirrhanteria*), those present, whether young or old, would not let him raise his voice in prayer, but would rush him and defend the gods from him (*Decl.* 13.18).<sup>29</sup> Philostratus' story about the hierophant at Eleusis backing off his refusal to let Apollonius into the sanctuary when he found the crowd was not with him taken in conjunction with the passage in Libanius does encourage the suspicion that priests in some sanctuaries may have had to rely on the worshippers present to help them enforce their authority. In other sanctuaries where valuables were kept the priests may have had attendants to help them.

Aelian, a sophistic writer of the second half of the 2nd century and of the early 3rd century, relates that on Mount Etna there is a grove with a temple in it sacred to Hephaestus, guarded by dogs who fawn on those entering the grove and approaching the temple in a chaste and fitting state, but who bite and tear at those whose hands are soiled (*enageis*), while they merely drive away those who come from some form of wanton intercourse (*NA* 11.3). The categories of person whom the dogs savage or drive away are almost certainly those that sanctuaries preferred to exclude. A Latin poet of the time of Augustus, Grattius, tells a similar story about men bringing sick animals to a shrine of Vulcan, probably on Mount Etna, to be healed and of a flame that emerged from the cave in which the shrine was to lick the offerings of those whose hearts were good (*cui bona pectore mens est* 456) and to visit an immediate punishment on those who had committed a crime and aroused the anger of the gods by daring in their guilt to

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judge from Ael. *NA* 11.4 and Aul. Gell. 6.1, is primarily a sign of the excellence of the moral character of the person rather than his divinity.

<sup>29</sup> On the setting up of regulations forbidding those whose hands are not pure (*katharoi*) to go into a precinct beyond the *perirrhanteria*, see Lucian *Sacr.* 13.

approach the shrine (456-60); wrongdoers and those who contemplated wrongdoing were commanded by the priest to stay well clear of the presence of the god and of his altars (447-49).

Ovid (*Fast.* 2.623-30) and Statius (*Silv.* 3.13-17) make it clear that the ritual command to the profane to take themselves off was in Rome by the Early Empire understood to refer not just to those who were ritually-impure, but to wrongdoers. There is reason to think that the ritually-repeated proclamation of the Roman priest had a Greek antecedent.<sup>30</sup> The Hellenistic poet Callimachus provides an instance of such repetition: wrongdoers (*alitroi*) are bade depart from the vicinity of a temple before the god makes his epiphany (*Hymn.* 2.2). The chances are high that real proclamations took such a form.

### *Mystery-Cult*

The clearest statement that moral uprightness was a requirement for entry into certain mystery-cults comes from the Platonist Celsus whose attack on Christianity Origen attempts to rebut in the *Contra Celsum*.<sup>31</sup> Celsus, who writes around AD 150, says that in certain mystery-cults those who are invited to participate must have pure hands and be intelligible in their speech; other mystery-cults again require that the would-be initiate be pure of all stain, that he have nothing bad on his conscience and that he should have lived well and justly (3.59).<sup>32</sup> There is some very late evidence in the *Historia Augusta*, in what purports to be a biography of Alexander Severus from the pen of one Aelius Lampridius, that a herald proclaimed at the Eleusinian Mysteries that no one was to enter, unless he was conscious of his own

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<sup>30</sup> Norden 1970:136.

<sup>31</sup> On the identity of Celsus and his philosophical allegiance, see Frede 1997:222-27.

<sup>32</sup> Poll. *Onom.* 8.90 reports that the Athenian *archon basileus* was in charge of the mysteries and made an announcement bidding all those charged with an offence to refrain from taking part in the mysteries.

innocence (SHA *Alex. Sev.* 18.3).<sup>33</sup> How early the practice started at Eleusis is impossible to determine, but there are already indications in Aristophanes' *Frogs* of 405 BC that purity of mind was a requirement for initiates in the Eleusinian Mysteries: the Chorus of Initiates bid those who have no experience in their words and who are not pure in mind (*gnomen me kathareuei*) to stay away from them (245-46). In the Hellenistic Age, initiation and participation in the mysteries were supposed to have a morally-improving effect. Thus the universal historian of the latter part of the 1st century BC Diodorus Siculus reports that those who have participated in the mysteries are said to be more pious (*eusebesteroi*), righteous (*dikaioterai*) and in every respect superior to their former selves (5.49.6).

#### *Epigraphic Testimony*

The earliest secure example of a regulation inscribed on stone or bronze governing entry to a sanctuary in which it is suggested that those who approach the god should not have done wrong belongs to the 4th century BC and comes from an East Greek city near Ephesus called Metropolis (*LSAM* 29). After setting down the number of days following a death or intercourse that a man approaching the Mother Goddess needs to allow elapse to be ritually-pure, the law moves on to lay down prohibitions against wrongdoing and concludes by observing that the goddess does not look benignly (*hileos*) on those who do wrong (*adikein*). Probably equally ancient is the distich in verse inscribed at the entrance to the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus. It declares that one entering the temple must be pure (*hagnos*) and that purity lies in a pious (*hosios*) mind.<sup>34</sup> Purity is, accordingly, defined as

<sup>33</sup> *quem ad modum in Eleusinis sacris dicitur, ut nemo ingrediatur, nisi qui se innocentem novit.* Syme 1968:85, 180-81 gives reason to think that Aelius Lampridius is an invention.

<sup>34</sup> A syncopated version of the distich was inscribed at the entrance to a temple in Mytilene (*LSS* 82). Neither the date nor the deity are known. The first sentence of the distich followed by a different second sentence known from Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 4.22.122) was incorporated in regulations from Rhodes of the 1st century AD but of unknown provenance (*LSS* 108.4-5).

a state of mind and not as being ritually-clean. The distich is cited by both Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.13.3) and Porphyry (*Abst.* 2.19), who will have found it in Theophrastus' lost work on piety. That means it dates to the 4th century BC or earlier.

An inscription from the vicinity of Sounion in Attica of the 1st century AD recording the provisions established by the founder of a cult of Men provides a parallel for the idea found in the regulations from Metropolis that the god looks benignly on worshippers who are just. It first sets out the periods and purifications necessary for ritual purity from the usual forms of pollution, then prescribes the sacrifices proper to the god and asks that the god look benignly (*eueilatos*) on those who in a simple and straightforward spirit (*haple psyche*) do him worship (*LSCG* 55); that is to say, his worshippers should not have anything devious or malicious in their hearts. A law from Lindos of the same period, on the other hand, reverses the order to declare that the first and most important consideration is that whoever enters the sanctuary should have pure (*katharos*) hands and mind, be wholesome (*hugies*) and be conscious of having done no wrong (*LSCG* 139); only then does it turn to the rubric of "the externals" (*ta ekstos*); they are the number of days that have to elapse after certain polluting activities. The same order is found in a law from Delos of the Roman period: it prescribes for anyone entering the sanctuary of Zeus Cynthius and Athena Cynthia pure hands and mind, white clothing, no shoes and not having eaten meat or having had intercourse with a woman (*LSS* 59). For the requirement that the would-be worshipper should have a good conscience three elegiac couplets from the acropolis of Lindos of the 2nd century AD celebrating the building of a temple on the instructions of the god and recording the tax the god imposed on those sacrificing may be cited (*LSS* 86).

From Philadelphia in Lydia there is an inscription of the 1st century BC recording the regulations for a private cult (*LSAM* 20). The oath to be taken by those who would enter the shrine spells out in some detail what kinds of conduct will offend the gods: they are planning ill against others, knowledge of and use of evil spells and incantations, love-philtres, abortifacients and contraceptives; if oath-takers do know

of those who have used them who are members of the cult, they are to expose the guilty parties; they are to swear not to seduce a free woman who has a husband, nor a slave who has a partner. Those who have contravened any of these regulations should not enter the shrine, since the gods will impose a terrible curse on such persons; they will, however, look benignly (*hileos*) on those who obey and will give all the goods that the gods are wont to give to men whom they love.<sup>35</sup> Appended to the regulations laying down conditions for those going past the *perirrhanteria* sitting at the entrance to the sanctuary of Athana Lindia on the acropolis of Lindos are two elegiac couplets whose form and intent is very much the same as the regulations from Philadelphia: they bid whoever is pure (*katharos*) enter the sanctuary confidently and command anyone who brings harm to leave the harmless temple and go wherever he wishes (*LSS* 91.23-26). The regulations themselves belong to the 3rd century AD and prescribe purity not only of body but of mind (4-5). After setting down what manner of dress is to be worn and the intervals of time to be observed after certain polluting events and activities, the regulations conclude with a ringing declaration: "From wrongdoing one is never again pure" (19).

### Conclusion

There is enough evidence to assert that from the 5th century BC the gods were believed to look benignly on the prayers and sacrifices of those whose moral conduct was irreproachable and to find the presence in their sanctuaries of those who had done wrong offensive. Philosophers, poets Greek and Latin, authors of speeches for public consumption, novelists, biographers of holy men and regulations for entry to sanctuaries all testify to the moral condition of the worshipper's being a source of concern. How very much purity of mind was taken for granted can be illustrated by the complaint made by a character in

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<sup>35</sup> Regulations governing the administration of a sanctuary at Vani in Colchis of the 4th or early 3rd century BC express the wish that the gods may look benignly (*hileos*) on those who abide by them (*SEG* XLV.1876.19-22).

Petronius' *Satyricon*, worried that a drought is due to a lack of proper religious observance on the part of his contemporaries:

No one now believes in heaven, no one fasts, no one gives a bean for Jupiter, but they all count their goods with their eyes open. In the old days, the women proceeded up the hill to the temple bare-footed and in long gowns, their hair spread to the winds, their minds pure (*mentibus puris*),<sup>36</sup> they asked Jupiter for rain and it immediately rained buckets (44.17-18).

Purity of mind for the speaker is as much part of due religious observance as the way in which the worshippers are garbed.

Purity of mind and a unblemished conscience are the general requirement for those praying to the gods, but there are certain forms of wrongdoing that are singled out for particular attention and were presumably thought to be especially offensive to the gods. Magic-working in its various forms comes at the head of the list. Then there are offences against sexual propriety such as corrupting the morals of married women or female slaves or sleeping with a stepdaughter. Finally, there are offences against other members of the family such as maltreating elderly parents, killing the newborn and engaging in fraternal strife (*Ov. Fast.* 2.623-30; *Stat. Silv.* 3.3.13-17).

The categories of person to be excluded from the catechumenate recorded in the *Traditio* and the *Constitutiones* do not precisely coincide with those whom it can be demonstrated were banned from entering shrines but there is a significant overlap. Magicians were clearly unwelcome at both pagan shrines and in Christian churches. Their presence in both cases was felt to be offensive to the divine. Gladiators would presumably have been driven away from a pagan shrine, since their hands were soiled with blood. What would have happened if some of the other persons stigmatized as *infames* had appeared at a sanctuary wishing to perform a sacrifice is an intriguing question, but not one that can be answered at present.

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<sup>36</sup> There is no reason to emend, as Leo did, *mentibus* to *vestibus*. Cult-regulations more often specify not pure but white clothing (*LSCG* 65.15, 163.13; *LSS* 59.14-15; 14.9, 35.5), although *LSS* 91.7 requires pure (*katharos*) garments.

In view of the considerable body of evidence that the gods were believed to look benignly on those of their worshippers whose consciences were clear why have scholars persuaded themselves that all that mattered in pagan cult was the correct performance of rituals and how have they dealt with the many counter-examples to that thesis? A large part of the explanation must be that Christian apologists have been successful in imposing a picture of pagan cult in which punctilious correctness in the performance of ritual is all-important, while the state of mind and the character of the worshipper are of no consequence.<sup>37</sup> Tertullian has contributed as much as anyone to this picture of pagan cult. He speaks of the filthy conscience of the pagan priests who perform sacrifices and of their paying close attention to the condition of the heart of their victims when really it should be their own vicious hearts that are scrutinized (*Apol.* 30.5).<sup>38</sup> It is ironic that Tertullian's portrayal of pagan cult should have been so influential when it itself has its origins in criticism on the part of pagan thinkers of those who imagined that the gods demanded no more of their worshippers than rituals and sacrifices faultlessly carried out and were not offended by the moral failings of those who approached them.<sup>39</sup>

Confronted by evidence of a moral dimension to pagan cult, scholars have characteristically explained away its existence in three ways: 1) the cult is Oriental and non-Greek or non-Roman in nature; 2) the

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<sup>37</sup> On the development of the notion of ritual in the history of religions and the increased importance accorded ritual action as against belief in the same sphere of study from the late 19th century on, see Bremmer 1998:14-24. For criticism of the view that in Greek religion "what was important was not the state of mind of the participant in ritual acts, but simply the performance," see Harrison 2000:18-22.

<sup>38</sup> *et post omnia iniquinamenta etiam conscientiam spurcam: ut mirer, cum hostiae probantur penes vos a vitiossimis sacerdotibus, cum cuius praecordia potius victimarum quam ipsorum sacrificantium examinantur.*

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the criticism at Lucian *Sacr.* 1 of those whose actions suppose gods so inadequate and ignoble as to be dependent on men and eager for flattery: such men are not to be thought pious (*eusebeis*), but wretches who are enemies of the gods.

moral element is a late development;<sup>40</sup> 3) philosophical influences have been at work.<sup>41</sup> The explanations are not mutually exclusive.<sup>42</sup> “Oriental” in this context supposes that the religious observance of the peoples of the Near East had a moral and spiritual dimension to it lacking in Greek and Roman paganism.<sup>43</sup> Its use reflects the conviction that Christianity has its roots in such Oriental spirituality. The appeal to development, evolution and progress rests on the assumption, baldly-stated in the past, that modern Western man represents the culmination of a long process of evolution from a primitive and childlike state to adult maturity. The study of Greek popular morality is instructive here: in the recent past it has been bedeviled by a propensity to trace an evolution from a state in which man’s moral consciousness was limited to his feeling an obligation to take care of the interests of his own immediate family and himself to one in which helping others and sacrificing one’s own interests came to be thought praiseworthy.<sup>44</sup> The developmental or evolutionary approach to ethics, although still in evidence, no longer holds the high ground. The same cannot be said of the study of Greek and Roman religion. Developmentalism, although not in so crass a form as in the study of Greek popular morality, is still a present force.

The appeal to the influence of philosophy to dispose of counter-examples is based on the assumption that philosophers are more advanced in their thinking and not necessarily in touch with the moral

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<sup>40</sup> For moral purity as a late development: Wachter 1910:8: “In späterer Zeit wird neben körperlicher vereinzelt auch moralische Reinheit gefordert.”

<sup>41</sup> Philosophy responsible for emphasis on ethics in *LSA* no. 20: Betz 1994:253.

<sup>42</sup> *LSS* 82 commentary, 108.4-7 commentary; philosophical influences evident in Oriental cults: *LSS* 91.4-5: “La mention de l’âme trahit une influence philosophique et morale qui apparait dans les cultes orientaux surtout.”

<sup>43</sup> So Cumont 1906:25-56; Turcan 1989:25-28; for the view that the introduction of the *ritus Graecus* in the 4th century BC satisfied the personal spiritual longings of some Romans, see Champeaux 1989:263-79.

<sup>44</sup> It is precisely such a development that Adkins 1960 believed he could trace. For criticism of some of the assumptions underlying Adkins’ work, see Williams 1993:4-6.

and religious feelings of ordinary people. Philosophers no doubt do on occasion promote radical ideas not shared by many other people. That is exactly what Plato and the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, who is perhaps following Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus, are held to have done in insisting that piety or respect for the gods (*eusebeia*) must have a moral component and that the gods look with greater favour on worshippers of unblemished moral character.<sup>45</sup> The positions taken by philosophers are, however, not necessarily at odds with what philosophically-unsophisticated people say and think: very often the philosopher sets out commonly-received ideas that he feels need to be properly articulated. There is ultimately no way of determining whether a philosopher is defining a term in a way that bears no recognizable resemblance to its normal usage, since we do not have access to everything that his contemporaries said. If, however, the term is given the same meaning in non-philosophical contexts, then there is reason to think that the philosopher has not imposed a radically new meaning on it. It is in fact possible to show that in non-philosophical contexts in the 5th and 4th centuries BC to be *eusebes* or *theosebes* is not only to perform large sacrifices to the gods, make generous offerings to them, and to be punctilious in the matter of ritual purity, but it is also to conduct oneself honourably in one's dealings with one's fellow-men.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, respect for the gods is imagined to consist

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<sup>45</sup> Thus Price 1999: 140 on the story at Porph. *Abst.* 2.16 that the sacrifices with which Apollo was best pleased were those of one Clearchus who merely honoured the gods with an offering of first fruits: "Scholars have sometimes taken this vivid story to sum up real Greek ideas about piety, but in fact it is a fantasy embedded in a philosophical argument deliberately distancing itself from conventional ideas of piety. Porphyry's own position and perhaps Theophrastus' are the extreme form of philosophical spiritualization of conventional piety." Porphyry's most extensive discussion of what the gods look for in their worshippers is at *Marc.* 9-24.

<sup>46</sup> Generosity in performing sacrifices and making offerings: Hdt. 1.86.2; punctiliousness in worshipping the gods: Hdt. 2.37; Hippoc. *Morb. sacr.* 1.24; Xen. *Mem.* 1.4.16; moral probity: Soph. *Phil.* 82-85, 1050-51; Eur. *Alc.* 597-605, frs. 286, 446.3-5, 684, 736, 1067 N<sup>2</sup>; Ar. *Plut.* 28; Xen. *Ages.* 10.2, *An.* 2.6.26, *Cyn.* 12.15-16; Plat. *Crat.* 39e.

not only in being punctilious in performing sacrifices, but in pursuing a righteous life, since a failure in either area causes the gods offence.<sup>47</sup>

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

- LSAM* Franciszek Sokolowski. *Lois sacrées de l'Asie Mineure*. (École française d'Athènes: Travaux et mémoires, 9.) Paris: E. de Boccard, 1955.
- LSCG* Franciszek Sokolowski. *Lois sacrées des cités grecques*. (École française d'Athènes: Travaux et mémoires, 18.) Paris: E. de Boccard, 1969.
- LSS* Franciszek Sokolowski. *Lois sacrées des cités grecques, Supplément*. (École française d'Athènes: Travaux et mémoires, 11.) Paris: E. de Boccard, 1962.

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<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting that at *Od.* 1.32-67 it is assumed that misdeeds and failing to perform sacrifices are of a piece.

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## HOW MONOTHEISTIC IS MANI'S DUALISM?

Once more on monotheism and dualism in Manichaean gnosis\*

CONCETTA GIUFFRÉ SCIBONA

For Ugo Bianchi,  
six years after

### *Summary*

A passage from the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis* (CMC 66,4) has led to a series of reflections and opinions from scholars on the dualistic or monotheistic nature of the original form of Manichaeism.

This essay outlines the *status quaestionis* and then goes on to examine, on the basis of texts and using the historico-comparative method, the analogies and differences between the historical “types” of monotheism and dualism (Judaean-Christianity, Mazdaism, gnosticism), and Manichaeism, which is related to them in different ways and in varying degrees.

Taking position in this debate between minimalist and maximalist points of view, the author attempts to identify the parameters of this original religious creation, and argues that theological monotheism and ontological dualism were, from its birth, coherent elements in its peculiar gnostic conception of reality.

I, Mani, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, The Father of Truth, from whom I was born, who lives and abides forever, existing before all things and abiding after all things—all things which have come into being and will be, exist through his Power. For from this very one I have been brought forth, but I also am from his will.<sup>1</sup>

It is well known that this passage from the *Codex Manichaicus Coloniensis* (CMC), in which the theologian Baraies quotes the beginning of the *Living Gospel* (Mani's fundamental work), has been the focus of reflection by Manichaean scholars on the nature or even the

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\* Many warm thanks to my dear friend and colleague G. Sfameni Gasparro: ... *sine verbis*.

<sup>1</sup> CMC 66, 4 ff.; trans. by Koenen 1990, 3.

original existence of Manichaean dualism. The problem is all the more evident because the same passage is also documented in the Middle-Persian and Sogdian texts M 17 + M 172 I.<sup>2</sup> In a masterful essay, L. Koenen quotes the M 17 in synopsis with the *CMC* text<sup>3</sup> and surveys the positions (in part derived from this text) of certain scholars regarding Mani's dualism. While accepting H.J.W. Drijvers's<sup>4</sup> definition of "optimistic Dualism," Koenen in particular rejects the conclusions of G. Stroumsa.<sup>5</sup>

According to Stroumsa, the *CMC* attests to an original, absolutely Jewish-Christian phase of Manichaean thought in which a primary form of non-ontological, but ethical, dualism still survives and cohabits substantially with a theological monotheistic conception. Koenen demonstrates, however, with comprehensive, reliable and balanced documentation, (1) that the radical, ontological dualism of the Manichaean system (with the implicit existence of all its mythical apparatus) is fundamentally present in the *CMC* and ergo constitutes an original datum in Manichaeism that "may be influenced by Zoroastrian beliefs, although Zoroastrian dualism is ethical in its heart";<sup>6</sup> and (2) that the cosmos and the human body are definitely given positive functions,<sup>7</sup> aspects that are underlined in the *CMC* in relation to Mani's body.

Regarding the two expressions proclaiming a monotheistic faith, in the second—"all things which have come into being and will be, exist through his Power"—Koenen identifies parallels with the New Testament (he interprets the Power through which all things exist as "Jesus the Splendour"). On the other hand, Mani complicates, and

<sup>2</sup> Boyce 1975, Text c, 32-33; cf. Gnoli 1994, 453 f.

<sup>3</sup> Koenen 1990, 2; cf. Henrichs and Koenen 1970, 193-195.

<sup>4</sup> Drijvers 1984; cf. Koenen 1990, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Stroumsa 1986; cf. Stroumsa 1984 = Stroumsa 1992, 243-258.

<sup>6</sup> Koenen 1990, 21. Cfr. Giuffré Scibona 1986. On the close connection in Zoroastrianism of the "ethical" with the "cosmic" cf. Bianchi 1958b, 84, 221; Gnoli 1994, 458. On the analogous but not identical connection in Manichaeism represented by the Manichaean *dikaïosyne* cf. Ries 1977, 1986, 1993; Giuffré Scibona 1997, 99.

<sup>7</sup> Koenen 1990, 13-24.

in my opinion deeply modifies, the sense of the Christian formula by adding the abbreviated version of an expression derived from the Pahlavi textual tradition: “what is, was, and will be” (pehl. *K  ast, b d, ud bav d*).<sup>8</sup> This formula, attested in various places of the *Kephalaia*,<sup>9</sup> indicates the passing of the three metaphysical ages that lead to God’s victory and thereby actuate the pre-eminence of the first principle over the second.

The expression—also present in the *Kephalaia*<sup>10</sup>—affirming the eternal nature of God “who lives and abides forever, existing before all things and abiding after all things” recalls parallel Jewish, Christian and Koranic formulations and appears to diverge from the Manichaean dogma of the coeternity of the two principles. Koenen believes that the emotional attachment to divine reality—which he compares to henotheistic positions or to pantheistic conceptions of pagan divinities of late antiquity (but the differences should also be taken into account!)<sup>11</sup>—induced Mani to give rhetoric “priority over dogma.” In Koenen’s view, therefore, in certain cases sentiment and rhetoric are elements that condition and limit the dogmatic structure of Manichaean dualism.<sup>12</sup>

Ugo Bianchi has expressed his authoritative opinion on this matter in various works.<sup>13</sup> In the first place he has clarified, through precise historical definitions, the nature of dualism in historico-religious phenomena. Since ethical dualism is an insignificant and misleading concept, Bianchi regards dualism as the doctrine according to which two principles, whether or not coeternal, determine and qualify the reality of what exists and manifests itself in the world. He defines Manichaean

<sup>8</sup> Widengren 1961, 150; for another analogous formula cf. *Greater Bundahi n* I, 2 (Zaehner 1955, 286): *b d ud ast ud ham  baw d*. Cf. Gnoli 1994, 453 f.

<sup>9</sup> *Keph.* 1, 15, 19 f.; 7, 34, 25 f.; 24, 73, 27 f.; 102, 257, 6 f. (ed. Gardner 1995, 21, 38, 75, 261).

<sup>10</sup> *Keph.* 7, 34, 25 f. (ed. Gardner 1995, 38).

<sup>11</sup> In Paganism these positions did not rule out the normal ritual practices dedicated to the other gods of polytheistic Pantheon.

<sup>12</sup> Koenen 1990, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Bianchi 1990; 1991; 1993.

dualism as radical and eschatological and he limits and specifies the positive role of the Manichaean cosmos, showing that its constituent element (apart from the two luminaries and the imprisoned light) is a dead and demonic substance derived from the slaughter of the demons and only later organized by a divine demiurge. Bianchi underlines such ontological negativity also in relation to the body, which is certainly the obligatory instrument of purification and salvation, but which originally was the product of an act of retaliation by demonic powers. As Bianchi notes, not even the providential character of Mani's body escapes these negative qualifications regarding substance, even if the Prophet, in the prologue of the *Living Gospel* quoted in the *CMC*, portrays himself in a relationship of direct derivation from the Father of Greatness. Precisely in that prologue, the monotheistic affirmation of the Father's eternal existence, over all that derives from him and exists through his power, raises the question whether Manichaean dualism may be subsequent to Mani's original monotheism (Stroumsa<sup>14</sup> and Tardieu<sup>15</sup>), or quite non-existent.

Bianchi takes a position against these hypotheses and against any possible heretical meaning of the expression—an expression that, says Koenen, is a sign of the rhetorical compromises accepted by Manichaean dogma (not always and uniformly coherent). The *aporia* is overcome by the consideration that the expression “all the things”—i.e. mankind and the cosmos—means everything having a positive ontological quality, whereas the dark material reality is put into the background (even if it continues to be substantially present in the world). Mani is essentially a self-defined prophet (“Apostle of Jesus Christ”) and, as such, he needs to style himself as a direct product of the God of Light, proclaiming at the same time God's eternity and God's direct

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<sup>14</sup> Stroumsa 1984 = 1992, 243-258; cf. Stroumsa 1986, 154.

<sup>15</sup> Tardieu 1981, 24, cf. 102. Giving greater importance to Manichaean prophetology situated in the Jewish-Christian tradition, Tardieu fails to account adequately for the Manichaean doctrine of the two principles and substances; cf. the well documented argument of Decret 1991, 60 ff.; cf. Sfameni Gasparro 1988, 46. Cf. also Tardieu 1988, 262.

relationship with the providential nature of history and of the things that he set in motion. Getting to the heart of the problem, Bianchi tackles the question of the coexistence between monotheism and dualism in the Manichaean system. On the one hand, he identifies in both Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism a typology of the divine according to which radical dualism provokes a *deminutio* of the divinity, whose omnipotence is reduced to the omniscience of an eschatological victory over his adversary and ergo to the power of organizing history accordingly. On the other hand, Bianchi points out that in Manichaeism an “essentialist” attitude emphasizes the opposition of the substances (dualism), whereas an “existential” attitude (based on consciousness of the adversary’s non-divinity) insists on the glorification of the Father of Greatness, giving rise to explicit monotheistic expressions.

Therefore, monotheism and dualism are, respectively, theological and ontological parameters of the Manichaean system. This factor is worthy of consideration, as are the roles that may have been played, in its original elaboration, by Mani’s Elchasaitic Judaeo-Christian education and by the dualism of Iranian tradition.

New contributions to the hypothesis that monotheism and dualism may coexist have been made recently by the Iranist G. Gnoli (1994), who advances important arguments in favour of the compatibility—or even the congruence—of the two lines of thought and provides useful references to their respective typologies. Gnoli rightly makes reference to a statement made by Pettazzoni that will be discussed further on.

Equally perceptive are Gnoli’s reservations on the meaning of “ethical” in Mazdeism, even though he is too quick to endorse the unacceptable hypothesis that the Manichaean formula depends totally on its Iranian counterpart. In fact, in the light of the latest studies and findings on Manichaeism (though we are perfectly aware of the presence there of some basic structures of Iranian religion), it is unacceptable to quote an expression of H.-Ch. Puech out of its context in order to affirm that “Mani restò fedele ad una delle ispirazioni fondamentali del mazdeismo, che attribuiva la creazione al Dio buono,

saggio e onnisciente,”<sup>16</sup> unless important and substantial specifications are added.

In his lucid and detailed argumentation, Puech refers this expression (preceded by a precise limitation: “sur ce point”) only to the “organisation du mélange qui suit la défaite initiale de Dieu” and certainly not to the creation, neither in the monotheistic sense of *creatio ex nihilo* nor in a total sense (“non pas le mélange pris en lui-même”). Puech, in fact, in the same context asks himself: “A vrai dire, peut-on même parler de ‘création’ dans le manichéisme?”<sup>17</sup> As I have tried to demonstrate in a previous paper (Giuffrè Scibona 1997), the creation, intended as total existence of cosmos and mankind, is the focal point only so far as an historical comparison between Mazdeism and Manichaeism brings to light their connections and especially their dissimilarities. As a matter of fact, even if the mechanisms of creation are organized according to an analogous dualistic pattern and are addressed to a similar aim, i.e. salvation, the specific ways and substances of the two religious contexts are profoundly different.

Actually, the “Creator,” or—as the *Vendidad* puts it—the “Creator of the world of the bodies,”<sup>18</sup> is Ahura Mazda, hindered by Ahriman’s *Patyāra*, the negative counter-creation which inspires corruption, violence, mendacity and the other forces that obstruct life. And, as Shaked demonstrates in an important essay of 1967, “the created world, *gētīg*, is entirely the work of Ohrmazd.”<sup>19</sup>

In the Manichaean view, on the contrary, the same reality results from an improper mixing of two distinct substances, one coming from the luminous substance of the Father of Greatness in a succession of evocations, the other from the dark and ontologically negative *Hyle*.

The gnostic quality of Manichaean dualism is based on the opposition of the substances, which is closely correlated (also in the *CMC*) to

<sup>16</sup> Gnoli 1994, 455; cf. Puech 1979, 142.

<sup>17</sup> Puech 1979, *ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Vendidad*, Farg. 2, I, 1 (ed. Darmesteter 1960, 20). This invocation occurs in the Farg. 2-8 *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Shaked 1967, 232.

the opposition of the originating natures.<sup>20</sup> It is in the field of creation, therefore, that we can make a clear distinction between Manichaean gnostic dualism and the opposition of principles and actions typical of Mazdeism.

After K. Rudolph's important contribution (1991), two significant essays by P.O. Skjaervø (1997) and W. Sundermann (1997) have recently examined both religious conceptions and have clearly and thoroughly indicated, paying close attention to the texts, the differences and analogies between the two systems on the basis of their developments.

Now, bearing in mind the points at issue and the positions of the different scholars, I would like in the first place to stress the importance of examining the subject in question—i.e. monotheism and dualism in Manichaean gnosis—in the wider historico-cultural contexts in which Mani acted: in the community in which he grew up (and where he met with failure) and later—as the original ecumenical vocation of his prophetic message commanded—in environments of far greater cultural variety and complexity. In Mesopotamia and western Eranshar,<sup>21</sup> in fact, whose cosmopolitan cities and ancient commercial routes by land or river had for many centuries promoted a dense gathering and mixing of cultures as well as of religious ideas and practices, Mani certainly came across various forms of gnostic systems which—along with the legalistic and encratic model of Jewish-Christianity of his first co-religionists—converged on the same cultural and geographical area. But he was certainly also acquainted with the Zoroastrian tradition which the mighty caste of the Mobad used to oppose to the various religious creeds which had spread throughout the vast territory of the Sassanian empire. There is no doubt that Mani's education took place in a monotheistic Jewish-Christian milieu under strict orthodoxy. But the Baptists' (not unanimous) reaction to Mani's dissent, the endeavours to persuade him to remain in the sect, the convening of a synod and the violent accusations launched against him—all these elements

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<sup>20</sup> *CMC* 65, 12 ff.; 84, 10-24; 85, 1-12.

<sup>21</sup> A comprehensive and detailed picture of 3rd century Iran in Gnoli 1985, 73-91.

show a community defending itself from the schismatic or heretical intrusions coming from a wide range of dissident trends and systems (gnostic or not) present throughout Syro-Mesopotamia. On the other hand, the creeds and practices of 3rd century Iran—even if we consider them alien to Mani's family tradition—were certainly not unknown to Mani himself, who in fact encountered them once again during his stay at the Sassanian court.

Nevertheless, in the construction that Mani created and passed down to his followers, from the earliest testimonies to the later ones, the elements that may have contributed to his personal religious experiences appear so deeply modified (in order to be inserted and be rendered functional as part of a whole) that it is impossible to trace them back to their original systems. Not even the gnostic structure of original dualism—which, with its strict encratism, is the keystone of the whole doctrine (though it is undeniably related to fundamental precepts of previous gnostic currents: Basilides's *barbaroi*, Bardesanes, the Sethian-Gnostics of Hippolytus, the *Paraphrase of Shem*)—may be neatly reduced to the historical sources of those experiences.<sup>22</sup> Another reason is that in a perfectly functioning mechanism such as Manichaeism it is dangerous and misleading to isolate a part, however fundamental, and use it as a term of comparison. But it is precisely the resistance of the Manichaean system to being circumscribed within the parameters of a historical typology and, on the other hand, its birth and development inside analogous and neighbouring religious worlds which stimulate the historian of religions to apply the instrument of his own discipline. In fact, if a historical typology lives only in the reality of its historical examples, comparison—wide, open, flexible and as attentive as possible to differences—is the ideal tool for defining the specificity of each of those examples. The aim, though, must be to compare functioning structures, and not single aspects or personalities, in order to consider the foundations and mechanisms of the system *per se* and relate them to precise lines of scriptural tradition. In contrast, it

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. the justified reservations of Sundermann 1997, 359 to the conclusions of Casadio 1996, 672.

is ineffective and methodologically erroneous to investigate historical origins or derivations in an almost mechanical way from unmodifiable patterns.

Considering that since its early documentation Manichaeism shows a relationship at various levels between monotheism and dualism, it may be useful to further clarify the objects of the two conceptions and their locations in their specific contexts. As regards the typology of dualism and radical Manichaeism, I think that it is difficult to find a definition which is more precise, articulate and exhaustive than the one suggested by U. Bianchi.<sup>23</sup> I only add that the words with which Mani criticizes Baptist practices demonstrate the strong and unequivocal presence of a radical dualism already in the first formulation of the system. Mani in fact emphasizes the anthropological—but already metaphysically defined—opposition of two substances in a tragic struggle entrusted to human responsibility until the end. This opposition is evident in the radical ontological impurity of the body, an impurity strictly related to the distinction between life and death, light and darkness.<sup>24</sup> For this reason it is not acceptable to talk—as G. Stroumsa does<sup>25</sup>—of a “social dualism,” maintaining that Mani’s polemic against the Elchasaites is a fact of purely cultic nature.

Stroumsa, an acute and shrewd researcher of gnostic and Manichaean contexts, overemphasizes the original Jewish-Christian environment of Mani’s formation in his evaluation of the Manichaean concept, as it appears in the *CMC* and (even more explicitly) in other documents. There is no doubt that Mani’s surroundings represented the basic humus, the traditional furrow of the Prophet’s new creation, which left its most evident mark on Manichaean Christology, prophetology, Paulinism, apocalypticism and rigid encratism. This environment, however, though not immune itself from gnostic influences, was soundly based on an absolutely monotheistic theology and even more on an anthropological doctrine that would never have admitted

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<sup>23</sup> 1991; 1993; cf. Bianchi 1978, 49-62; Bianchi 1983a.

<sup>24</sup> *CMC* 81-85, esp. 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> Stroumsa 1986, 154; idem 1992, 246 f.

in man (God's creature in body and soul) the idea of the two *ousiai*. This gnostic view of man, and the concept of *anima mundi*,<sup>26</sup> which are clearly present since the beginning as background motifs of the *CMC* narration (as shown by Mani's behaviour as an elect),<sup>27</sup> are later expressed explicitly as the culminating point of Mani's revelation and opposition to the Baptists.<sup>28</sup> In the *CMC*, the young Mani detaches himself gradually<sup>29</sup> and covertly<sup>30</sup> from his co-religionists according to a narrative scheme typical of Prophets' life-stories. The reason for this is to safeguard his own life,<sup>31</sup> as is evident at the moment of his definitive separation.<sup>32</sup> However, in the *CMC* we can observe two parallel temporal processes:<sup>33</sup> one related to the body,<sup>34</sup> the other to the *Nous*, which can receive the *Syzygos*' revelation.<sup>35</sup> In the latter process it is possible to recognize the various levels of Manichaean *gnosis*,<sup>36</sup> which can be acquired only gradually.<sup>37</sup> Mani also acts as a model when he shows how this knowledge—which brings salvation—can be attained.

As Stroumsa rightly points out,<sup>38</sup> the esotericism of Mani's teaching has many analogies also with the esotericism of Jewish-Christian

<sup>26</sup> *CMC* 6-10; 12, 1-6. Cf. Ries 1986, 173 ff., 1993, 187 ff.

<sup>27</sup> *CMC* 5, 4-8; 6, 2-6; 9, 1-14.

<sup>28</sup> *CMC* 84, 10-24; 85, 1-12.

<sup>29</sup> *CMC* 30, 4-7.

<sup>30</sup> *CMC* 4, 12; 25, 2-12; 26, 1-6; 73, 17-22; 74, 1-2.

<sup>31</sup> *CMC* 8, 11-14.

<sup>32</sup> *CMC* 87, 12-14.

<sup>33</sup> Bianchi 1986, 28-29.

<sup>34</sup> *CMC* 11, 7 ff.; 12, 8 ff.; 17, 8 ff.; 18, 1-16.

<sup>35</sup> *CMC* 3, 8-13; 13, 2-13; 14, 4-14; 15, 1-14. Cf. Giuffré Scibona 1986, 357 f.

<sup>36</sup> *CMC* 21, 2-16 (concerning the body); 22, 1-16 (concerning the Father of Greatness, the divine origin of his own soul as a part of the *anima mundi* and *substantia Dei*); 34, 1-8 (concerning the Fourfold God, the Ships of Light, the Bosom of the Column, the deities in it, the Power, i.e. the *machina mundi*); 35, 1-10 (concerning the Manichaean Ecclesia); 41, 1-5 (concerning the original battle of the Manichaean myth); 65, 12 ff. (concerning the two principles and the way of the mixture); 132, 11 ff. (concerning the two natures and three times).

<sup>37</sup> On this topic Giuffré Scibona 1982, 166 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Stroumsa 1986, 153-158.

sects (besides, all the esoteric systems of this period derive their ultimate model from the tradition of Hellenistic *mysteria*). It is the original content, however, that completely modifies its perspectives and methods. Mani's psychological isolation from his co-religionists not only reflects a common *topos* of the Prophets' life histories (cf. similar Gathic images related to Zarathustra)<sup>39</sup> but also exemplifies, in the person of Mani, a typical situation of the Manichaean *gnostik s* "in the midst of the multitude entangled in error."<sup>40</sup> Neither Mani's isolation nor his gradual detachment shows an "anthropological" or "social" dualism. The opposition that occurs in Mani's case is different from the Qumranic distinction between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, even if Mani certainly inherited forms and images from these contexts too, as he did from other models (Iranian, gnostic and otherwise) that circulated in his original environment. Although the *CMC* text culminates in this opposition (which has ontological foundations),<sup>41</sup> the actual aim of the narration is Mani's testimony of his prophetic mission and not a conscious and systematic explanation of the theogonic and cosmogonic principles of his religious view.

On the one hand, the purpose of the text makes it necessary to place the only God in direct relationship to his Prophet, when his providential coming into the world is described. This is underlined by the appropriate quotation—taken from the *Living Gospel*—of the monotheistic proclamation.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, in the person of Mani and in the *Syzygos*' revelations (which provide answers to typically gnostic questions)<sup>43</sup> we can find the tragically contradictory mixture in the human being of a soul of light and a body of darkness. And when Mani, refer-

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<sup>39</sup> Yn. 46, 1.

<sup>40</sup> *CMC* 31, 4-8.

<sup>41</sup> *CMC* 84, 10-24; 85, 1-12.

<sup>42</sup> *CMC* 66, 4 ff.; immediately before (65, 12 ff.)—as Koenen (1990, 5) notes—the same Baraies quotes a fragmentary passage from Mani's Letter to Edessa expressing the dualistic concept of the "foundation of all good and evil deeds."

<sup>43</sup> *CMC* 21; 22; 23.

ring to the authority of Elchasai,<sup>44</sup> believes that he is taking the Saviour's commandments back to their original meaning, he actually intends to refer to—along with monotheism—the gnostic dualistic doctrine of the *anima mundi* suffering in the elements. What he is referring to, therefore, are the rules of the *anapausis*,<sup>45</sup> the Augustinian *signaculum manuum*: this is the “secret mystery” which accompanies Mani from the beginning of the narration<sup>46</sup> and which is revealed to him more and more deeply. In this way the *CMC* reflects an irremediable fundamental contrast between an absolute Jewish-Christian encratic monotheism on the one hand, and a gnostic monotheistic theology and dualistic ontology on the other, whose functional relation is an original creation of Mani. As is shown by his criticism of Baptist practices, Mani knows very well that these respective positions are too far apart<sup>47</sup> to be reconciled and he subsequently demonstrates that those purifying practices are absolutely useless.<sup>48</sup> This criticism contains a precise gnostic concept. Mani will proclaim in front of his co-religionists that purification and salvation can be gained only through *gnosis*, a knowledge whose contents and aims are represented by the distinction (*chorismós*)<sup>49</sup> of the two substances—Light and Darkness—that make up man.

It is not possible, therefore, to affirm that “l'analyse du Codex manichéen de Cologne ne semble révéler aucun trace de dualisme ontologique.”<sup>50</sup> An ontological dualism and a theological monotheism coexist coherently in it. The asymmetry of the two principles, present in a coherent *continuum* in many passages of the textual tradition,<sup>51</sup> neither affects the sense of the dualistic pattern nor reduces

<sup>44</sup> *CMC* 94; 95; 96; 97, 1-16.

<sup>45</sup> On the meaning of the *anapausis* in the *CMC*, cf. Henrichs 1973, 48-50; Bianchi 1986, 18-22; Ries 1986, 174, 179 ff.

<sup>46</sup> *CMC* 5, 3-8.

<sup>47</sup> *CMC* 73, 8-16; 79, 15-21; 80, 1-15.

<sup>48</sup> *CMC* 81; 82; 83; 84, 1-9.

<sup>49</sup> *CMC* 84, 9-24; 85, 1-12.

<sup>50</sup> Stroumsa 1992, 246.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 250 ff.

its importance. This pattern, without being ditheistic, is no less radical and absolute, and the incommensurability between the two principles emphasizes the structural function of monotheism and dualism. Such “lack of balance”<sup>52</sup> between the two principles—which, like the monotheism-dualism pattern, is also found in the Iranian tradition—receives a new and completely different meaning and greater evidence in Manichaeism because both God and his evil counterpart are attributed a nature of substances.<sup>53</sup> The aim is to restore the power of the only God, diminished by the presence of this second principle. The superiority of the Father of Greatness—stressed in the *CMC* with expressions of monotheistic character in relation to the person of Mani<sup>54</sup>—is founded on the ontological difference from—and opposition to—the *Hyle* and on his consubstantiality with his own functions and with the *anima lucis* imprisoned in mankind and the *cosmos*. This Manichaean monotheism is undeniably an original creation of Mani that diverges substantially from absolute monotheism, whether Zoroastrian or Jewish-Christian.

As regards the phenomenon of monotheism in the field of history of religions, it is useful to recall the fundamental achievements that have been made by R. Pettazzoni.<sup>55</sup> He separated monotheism from the misleading issue of the Supreme Being among primitive peoples and defined it as a specific historical fact occurring only in Judaism (and by derivation in Christianity and Islam) and Zoroastrianism. Concerning this latter religious tradition, Pettazzoni remarks that:

L'idea monoteistica ci appare nel Zoroastrismo delle origini allo stato puro. In realtà il dualismo non è negazione del monoteismo, anzi è il monoteismo stesso in due aspetti opposti e contrari.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> The expression is that of Shaked 1967, 234 in reference to the Pahlavi texts. For Manichaeism cf. Bianchi 1988a; Casadio 1996, 665 on the obvious character of it in every form of dualism.

<sup>53</sup> Bianchi 1990, 224-226; Bianchi 1988a; 1988b.

<sup>54</sup> *CMC* 19, 8-11; 22, 3; 66, 4 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Pettazzoni dedicated two volumes to this important topic for historians of religions (1922; 1955), plus several essays.

<sup>56</sup> Pettazzoni 1920, 96, 112.

This definition can be further enriched by some observations of A. Bausani,<sup>57</sup> this great and unforgettable scholar of Islam (as well as of the Iranian world and of Far-Eastern languages and cultures), who distinguished between two types of monotheism: a primary one (Jewish and Islamic, marked by prophetic sermons and identifying the divine with a single, transcendent personal God) and a secondary one, derived from the former. The characterizing element of Iranian monotheism, which Bausani calls "failed Monotheism," is a sort of progressive "fermentation of the One God"<sup>58</sup> which, from Gathic texts right through Middle-Persian ones, increasingly concretizes and personifies psychological or moral attributes of the personal God of theism. This process, alien to both Hellenic culture and the culture of primary monotheisms, seems to involve also the transcendent evil hypostases and, in my view, this is a completely different matter from the personification of the *aeons* of the gnostic *pleroma*. This is undoubtedly one of the main points of the mythical fabulation,<sup>59</sup> in which the story of the Manichaean God is expressed together with its negative counterpart. At the same time, we can perceive the analogies and differences between the respective functions and relationships of Iranian and Manichaean monotheism-dualism. The divine reality moves from protology to eschatology through a millenary struggle of creatures in the former case and of substances in the latter. Between these two poles operates, at various levels, a mechanism of separation and reintegration which is not a mere exercise of opposing polarities invented by Mani or by the Manichaean doctors (as Tardieu<sup>60</sup> would have it), but is the painful existence lived by humans. Though man feels

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<sup>57</sup> Bausani 1957; 1963.

<sup>58</sup> Bausani 1963, 168.

<sup>59</sup> On the value of Manichaean mythology as "méthaphysique 'vécue,'" cf. Bianchi 1993, 21 ff. The circular relationship between anthropology and metaphysics and their coexistence give Manichaean ethics a quite particular nature, completely different from Christian ethics, while the different consistence of the two substances in every single human being causes the alternative of perdition or salvation to be worked in the inner nature of man. *Contra* Stroumsa 1992, 257 f.

<sup>60</sup> 1981, 24; cf. 27, 37; 102.

consubstantial—in his luminous essence—with that only God whom he recognizes as such, he is nonetheless aware that salvation or eternal imprisonment depend on progressive self-consciousness of his degree of mixture and on consequent observance of the rules of solidarity that govern the substances. In Manichaeism the reality of such a dynamic form of monotheism-dualism is inseparably tied with the personalities and the fundamental motifs of—above all—Jewish-Christianity (see the magnificent and pathetic transformation of Jesus) but also of other religious traditions.

An example of the inextricable interweaving of such different components is already found in the great eschatological fresco of the *Sh buhrag n*, where motifs and personages of the Iranian tradition join scenes and expressions from the New Testament. Once the distinction between the damned and the saved has been made and once the great purifying fire and the imprisonment of Darkness have taken place, divine functions and luminous substances can abandon their temporary homes and reconstitute the Paradise of Light in the presence of the Father of Greatness, whose face is visible at last.<sup>61</sup>

A not dissimilar description of the reintegration of the only divine reality at the end of the eschatological purification is found in *Keph. 5*, 1-21:

... ] and they go in to him and become [... / ...pe]rfume[...s]etup[... an]d they reign for ever, and a single God comes to be [...ov/er] the totality, being above [the to]tality. You find no opponent/from this time on again/st the Father, the King of the Light and the [... / ...] which they ... in from the [beginning...] they are mixed and joined with one another.<sup>62</sup>

A passage of the same section,<sup>63</sup> set in the protological perspective that precedes and mirrors the eschatological one, clearly outlines the situation of the two principles and natures before mixing takes place.

<sup>61</sup> This eschatological picture, deduced from Middle-Persian and Parthian texts, is traced by M. Boyce 1975, 8, who publishes *ibidem*, 76-81 six fragments of the ms. A more complete edition in MacKenzie 1979; 1980.

<sup>62</sup> Ed. Gardner 1995, 10.

<sup>63</sup> 3, 32-36. Gardner 1995, 10.

Here too, in this “important genre for the propagation of the religion”<sup>64</sup> that reflects “the auroral memory of the disciples,”<sup>65</sup> the foundation is the coexistence of dualism and monotheism. The following statements in *Keph.* 34, 22-26 are based on the certainty of final victory and on the absolute incommensurability of the Father of Greatness with respect to matter:

The First Father is the Father of Greatness, the blessed one of the glory, the [on]e who has no measure to his gr[ea]tness; who also is the first o[n]ly begotten, the f[i]rst eternal; who exists with fiv[e] f[ath]ers for ever; the one who exists before everything that has existed and that will exist.<sup>66</sup>

A theological affirmation of this type, very similar to the one contained in the *CMC*, appears in no way heretical in a work meant for religious education such as the *Kephalaia*, if one perceives its meaning in the light of the violent attack that *Keph.* 286, 24-288, 18<sup>67</sup> launches against the monotheistic conception of Christianity. When, as everybody knows, Mani is introduced to speak, he asks where the evils of the world come from if in the beginning nothing existed outside God. He subsequently answers this question with the evangelical parable of the two trees, interpreted dualistically. But from a comparison with the qualities of the single, creating and transcendent<sup>68</sup> God of historical Monotheism, it is clear that the nature of the Manichaean Father of Greatness boils down to his closed and articulate relationship with the particular individual essences of the *anima lucis* and with the personifications/functions of the Divinity, which all constitute an absolutely compact whole.<sup>69</sup> So *Keph.* 63, 19-64, 12<sup>70</sup> teaches that the denomination “Father of Greatness” defines

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<sup>64</sup> Gardner 1995, XX.

<sup>65</sup> Gardner 1995, XXIII.

<sup>66</sup> Gardner 1995, 38.

<sup>67</sup> Gardner 1995, 288-289.

<sup>68</sup> On the logically difficult assumption of the transcendence of the Manichaean God cf. Decret 1991, 61, who bases his demonstration on Augustinian texts.

<sup>69</sup> On this topic cf. Bianchi 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1991.

<sup>70</sup> Gardner 1995, 66-67.

the “first esta/[b]lished thing. . . His great[ness is the gr]eat earth where he lives, he being established/[i]n it [. . .] the essence of the light that swathes/all the [r]ich go[d]s and the angels and the dwellings/[. . .] is set over it/.” But this designates also “the Third Ambassador,” “Jesus the Splendour,” “the Pillar of Glory,” “the Light Mind.”

The theodicy—the main subject of polemical controversies—demonstrates more clearly that God’s specificity in Manichaeism emerges precisely from his relationship with the negative principle. The incommensurability between the two principles is already pointed out by the Neoplatonic Alexander of Lycopolis (the first witness of Manichaeism in Egypt), who affirms that “the measure of God’s goodness surpasses by far that of the evilness of matter”<sup>71</sup> but it is underlined with much more emphasis in Augustine’s polemical writings, as F. Decret has well demonstrated in an important paper.<sup>72</sup>

When Milevi’s Manichaean bishop Faustus, defending himself from the accusation of ditheism, attacks his adversaries, he does nothing but affirm the uniqueness of his God:

Unus deus est, an duo? Plane unus, quomodo ergo vos duos adseritis? Numquam in nostris quidem adsertionibus duorum deorum auditum est nomen. sed tu unde hoc suspicaris cupio scire. quia bonorum duo principia traditis. est quidem, quod duo principia confitemur, sed unum ex his deum vocamus, alterum hyle, aut, ut communiter et usitate dixerim, daemonem.<sup>73</sup>

The question is obviously not only nominal but substantial, as Faustus will say to his adversaries. So he stresses the opposition between the two principles, of which only one is God, and compares them to pairs of opposites:

quodsi tu hoc puta duos significare deos, poteris et medico disputante de infirmitate atque sanitate duas easdem putare sanitates; et cum quis bonum nominat et malum, tu poteris eadem duo putare bona . . . si et de albo et nigro disputante me et frigido, et calido et dulci et amaro dicas, quia duo alba et duo calida et duo dulcia ostenderim, nonne videberis mentis incompus et cerebri

<sup>71</sup> *C. manich. opin. Disp. II* (transl. Horst and Mansfeld 1974, 52).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. n. 15.

<sup>73</sup> *C. Faustum XXI*, 1, 9-14, *CSEL XXV*, 1, 568.

minime sani? Sic et cum duo principia doceo, deum et hylen, non idcirco videri iam debeo tibi duos ostendere deos.<sup>74</sup>

Here, in the same way as in the *Kephalaia*, the contrast between this particular conception of God and Jewish-Christian monotheism allows us to determine the respective characteristics of the two opposites and offers the Manichaean bishop the occasion to emphasize the superiority of Manichaeism insofar as Christians—like pagans—*bona et mala, mutabilia et certa . . . corporalia et divina unum habere principium dogmatizant*.<sup>75</sup>

Other polemical passages of Augustine's writings underline the nature of the Manichaean God and the compactness—in the divine reign—of the substance of Light, which spreads over the cosmos. So, in his exegesis of the description of the Father's reign in the *Epistula Fundamenti*, the Manichaean Felix, hounded by Augustine's insistent questions, bases dualistic Manichaean ontology on *Gen*, 1.1-2.<sup>76</sup>

Felix then returns to his Manichaean texts and explains the nature of the *terra lucida et beata*:

Dixisti ergo de terra illa in qua Deus habitat, an facta est ab illo, an generavit illam, an coeterna illi est. Et ego dico, quia quomodo Deus aeternus est, et factura apud illum nulla est, totum aeternum est.<sup>77</sup>

Again, in reply to Augustine's question *si quae genuit Deus, coaeterna non sunt illi, melior est terra illa quam non generavit Deus, ubi habitant omnia quae generavit Deus, quam terram dicis ab eo non generatam*, Felix specifies: *Coaqueantur sibi omnia, et quae generavit, id est, terra illa ubi commorabatur . . . Et qui generavit et quos generavit, et ubi positi sunt, omnia aequalia sunt*.<sup>78</sup> And to Augustine's precise question whether *unius ergo substantiae sunt?* he replies: *Unius*.<sup>79</sup> In an attempt to cause Felix to contradict himself,

<sup>74</sup> C. *Faustum* XXI, 1, 15-25, CSEL XXV, 1, 568.

<sup>75</sup> C. *Faustum* XX, 3, 11-12, CSEL XXV, 1, 537.

<sup>76</sup> C. *Felicem* I, XVII, 531 (ed. Jolivet-Jourjon 1961, 684-689).

<sup>77</sup> C. *Felicem* I, XVIII, 532, 688.

<sup>78</sup> C. *Felicem* I, XVIII, 532, 690.

<sup>79</sup> C. *Felicem* I, XVIII, 532, 690.

Augustine insists: *Hoc quod est Deus pater, hoc sunt filii ipsius, hoc et terra illa?* And Felix answers: *Hoc unum sunt omnes.*<sup>80</sup> Augustine continues: *Hoc totum una substantia est?* The answer: *Una.*<sup>81</sup>

In this way, by a comparison between this form of monotheism and the Jewish-Christian one, we can perceive the difference between the two religious phenomena. The term monotheism, however, is more suitable for the Jewish-Christian model, because in this case—as Bianchi remarks<sup>82</sup>—the *monos* component has a content that is reflexive, polemic, and inclusive (and at the same time exclusive) of its opposite. In Manichaean monotheism, instead, the deity, although unique in its substance, is defined as light in darkness only through its relationship with diabolic matter. This particular character of Manichaean monotheism as well as the divergence between Manichaean and Iranian dualism in the God-cosmos-man relationship demonstrate the radical and profoundly gnostic essence of Manichaean religion. And it is precisely the gnostic concept which, in its various components, plays a decisive role in Mani's original organization of his system.

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<sup>80</sup> *C. Felicem* I, XVIII, 532, 690.

<sup>81</sup> *C. Felicem* I, XVIII, 532, 690.

<sup>82</sup> 1958a, 65 ff.

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EARLE H. WAUGH

### *Summary*

A new dictionary is always a kind of benchmark, reflecting current thinking on topics in subtle ways. The *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* has been hailed as ground-breaking, and it has accumulated a number of awards. Yet in the 25 years of its preparation, many religious issues had to be negotiated, since translation is often a reflection of the culture of the day. This article analyzes the principal problems in religion wrestled with in the Dictionary, and indicates how debates within the religion academy have impacted on the translation. The article ends with some observations on the contribution that Cree makes to current debates in Religious Studies.

In recent years, the government of Canada has made a formal apology to the Aboriginal people of Canada,<sup>2</sup> and has received the results of a historic federal inquiry, calling for major revamping of a whole range of things from white-Aboriginal relations to settlement of land claims.<sup>3</sup> Some of the problems have to do with the foundations of how white society classifies, categorizes and conceptualizes Aboriginal religion. It is to these issues that this study is directed.

When she began her work, Sister Nancy asked me to work with her on the project, helping her with fine-tuning translation, assisting with the organization of data, imputing material in data banks and providing linguistic procedures and academic counselling. It was obvious to me

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given at the IAHR World Congress in Durban, 2000. I am indebted to the critical comments of Jordan Paper and Armin Geertz, both then and subsequently. While their valuable suggestions have not all been incorporated, the article would be far less than it is without their input. I am most grateful to them.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Canada, *Statement of Reconciliation*, 7 January, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Canada, Royal Commission in Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 4 vols., Ottawa: The Commission, 1996.

that her original design—to develop a Cree dictionary of all Cree dialects—was not possible, and that we should set our sights on the more local environment. There are, in fact, five major dialects in Cree, and some combinations with other languages, such as Ojibwa.<sup>4</sup> In Alberta, the dominant dialects are the so-called TH and Y dialects, or as they are identified in the Dictionary, Northern and Plains Cree. We therefore focused our research on these major dialects.

We utilized Fr. Albert Lacombe's *Dictionnaire de la Langue des Cris*,<sup>5</sup> published in 1874, a book regarded as the foundation of Cree language study in Alberta as the basis of our Cree words. We had proceeded to the letter "L," when Sister Nancy became ill and before she died, she extracted a promise from me that the dictionary would be completed. With the help of a team of elders, and particularly George Cardinal, an elder from Wabasca, Alberta, as well as approximately \$250,000 in funding from a wide variety of sources, *The Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* was published in December, 1998.<sup>6</sup> Well received by the Cree people, it is now a standard reference in Cree schools across the province and in other areas of Cree-speaking Canada, and has been described as "a landmark in Cree language study in Canada."<sup>7</sup>

### *Cree Language Study and the History of Religions*

When one is trained within the broadly constructed discipline of the History of Religions at Chicago, under the master of *religionswissenschaft* and *religionsgeschichte*, Mircea Eliade, undertaking the task of rendering one language into another did not seem to be such a formi-

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<sup>4</sup> See David Pentland, "A Historical Overview of Cree Dialects," in *Papers of the Ninth Algonquin Conference*, ed. W. Cowan, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1978, 104-126.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Lacombe, *Dictionnaire de la Langue des Cris*, Montreal: Beauchemin et Valois, 1874.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy LeClaire and George Cardinal, *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary / alperta ohci kehtehayak nehiyaw otwestamakewasinahikan*, ed. Earle Waugh, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press and Duval House Publishing, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> *Quill and Quire*, July, 1999, 49.

dable task. However, as we began to wrestle with the problems of this rendering, it became increasingly clear that the assumptions and constructions of the discipline were at serious odds with the data as represented in the language. The Cree people believed that their language had roots far deeper in the environment of what is called Canada than either the French or English were willing to accept—that it “grew out of” a cultural mind-set that pre-dated the European development of those languages and was therefore more attuned to life in North America than either of the European languages with which the Aboriginal peoples had to contend. Moreover, it soon became apparent that the history of European religion, the integrative impulses of Christianity and the political situation of Aboriginal culture in Canada had played and was playing a role in the interpretation of words, even among the Cree. What had to be done was a delicate balancing act between the religious interest of pre-contact Cree, insofar as they could be known, and the overwhelming dominance of Christian understanding. Yet we had no privileged high ground. We were placed within the fray, so to speak, even as we tried to find a “scientific” territory in independence and legitimacy. Mindful of critics like David Chidester who branded Max Muller and the early theorists of religion as “Imperial,”<sup>8</sup> and Edward Said who unleashed the word “orientalism” in its current pejorative sense into our discourse,<sup>9</sup> we still had the very practical problem of how best to render a concept from one conceptual system into another, quite different one. The task must still be done even if the whole problem of “comparative” in comparative religion is in dispute.<sup>10</sup> What

<sup>8</sup> See David Chidester, “Colonialism,” in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, New York and London: Cassell, 2000, 423-37 (esp. 430-31).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon, 1978.

<sup>10</sup> Luther H. Martin, “Introduction: The Post-Eliadean Study of Religion and the New Comparativism,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (1996) 1-3; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

I hope to do here is review a few samples of this complex balancing procedure in order to illustrate the problematic. Perhaps then we will be in a position to reflect back on what the *Dictionary* might tell us about the discipline.

*Issue One: Conceptualization of Religion*

It is worth noting that the scientific study of religion, at least as envisioned by its founder, Max Müller, was analogically related to that of philology. He believed that the two disciplines were structurally related, for he accepted that both were “comparative.” What were available now, were survivals of earlier forms, perhaps manipulated by social contact with other forms; the task of the religion scholar was to decipher the patterns of diffusion, and to describe the outcomes of contacts.

The difficulty was in establishing what “forms” were most basic and foundational. Clearly when we choose a form like “the sacred” as a fundamental one, we have made a selection arising out of a particular religious experience and environment. Need it be considered universal? More to the point, how does one translate the concept of “the sacred” into a language that prides itself on constructing the world as developed in North America’s north in which other kinds of “basic concepts” were prized?

Let us consider the conceptual problem of “*manito*.” *Manitou* (the difference in spelling derives from an alternative, but not necessarily superior orthography)<sup>11</sup> was one of those concepts appropriated by

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<sup>11</sup> In general, the orthography of the *Dictionary* follows the protocols developed by several Canadian scholars of Cree over that last quarter century; these include Douglas C. Ellis, *Spoken Cree: West Coast of James Bay*, rev. ed., Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983; Freda Ahenakew, *Cree Language Structures: A Cree Approach*, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1987; H. Christoph Wolfart and Janet Carroll, *Meet Cree: A Practical Guide to the Cree Language*, 2nd ed., Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981. For our purposes here, only a few protocols need be noted: the ‘tch’ sound, as in the name Saskatchewan is rendered only as ‘c’; there are no ‘u’ sounds, but short and long ‘o’; we indicate long vowels with a ^ over the vowel, as in â (as in land); î is thus long and is rather like the ee in been, while ê like the ‘i’ in hit

European theorists to construct the evolutionary model of religions:<sup>12</sup> *Manitou*, *orenda*, and *wakan* were drawn from North American peoples, and purported to describe the very first and most primitive kind of religious awarenesses of supernatural power.<sup>13</sup> Even Hultkrantz seemed willing to allow *manito* the possibility of fitting this descriptor.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, when we began translating the term from Cree, that is not what we found. *Manito*-type words on the Cree side of the Dictionary total more than a column and a half. We will review the various aspects of this word, but before we do, it is important to note that sacred on the English side is not directly related to *manito* at all, but to *kihci*—that is, to something holy, good or sacramental. *Manito* on the other hand is the element crucial in the translation of God or mysterious power in the universe.

We are immediately presented with a significant problem when we analyze the Cree words that have *manito* at their root. In the first place, *manito* collects several English words in its translation attempts:

*manito*: sacred power or god; the basic mysterious quality in the universe.  
*manitohkan*; the objects embodying sacred power or spirit power; totem  
*manitohkatew*; s/he worships the sacred  
*manitohkew*; s/he makes her/him a spirit power  
*manitohkewin*; sacred power in a concrete form  
*manito kisikan pisim*; December, God's moon

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for Northern Cree, while for Plains speakers it is closer to the first 'e' in eke. Further information can be found in the introductory section, XXIII.

<sup>12</sup> Thus R.R. Marett (1866-1943) and E.B. Tylor (1832-1917) with their focus on animism and pre-animism; finally the whole "original" experience of a supernatural, impersonal force was called after a Melanesian word *mana*. See Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd ed., La Salle, Il.: Open Court, 1986, 51-67; orig. ed., London: Duckworth, 1975.

<sup>13</sup> As is found, for example, in R.R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, London: Methuen, 1914, drawn from R.H. Codrington, *The Melanesians*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915, 530-532.

<sup>14</sup> See Åke Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians*, transl. by Monica Setterwell, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979; orig. *De amerikanska indianernas religioner*, Stockholm, 1967.

*manitominahatik*; a black currant tree or bush  
*manitopiwapisk*; a powerful steel (magnet)  
*manitowatan*; it has spirit power or it is religious  
*manitoweyihcikewin*; being a devoted admirer; idolatrous  
*manitoweyicikew*; s/he believes things to be spiritually charged  
*manitowokosisan*; the Son of God  
*manitowiw*; s/he has medicine power or sacred power  
*manitowokeyicikew*; s/he believes in things as God

Here are the issues with which we wrestled: Does the root *manito* have any corresponding conceptual formula in English? The immediate answer appears to be, no. For example, there does not seem to be any absolute relationship between the notion of *manito* and God, for then how would one explain *manitopiwapisk* as a powerful magnet, or *manitominahatik*, the black current bush? This is so even if it is argued that these words have been influenced by post-contact interaction (the Cree people deny that to have been the case, in either of these examples, but most emphatically in the second of these uses). Nor is there any essential god-connection to *manitoskatask*, even if it is translated as medicine root. For the fundamental understanding of that word is that it is a ginger plant, that has a strong taste and that it is known to be used by the people for some medicinal purposes. It has no non-earthly referents associated with it. For example, an Cree elder may often be heard to counsel:

*Namoya awiyak kiskeyitam tansi esi sikâsiyit manito-a.*  
 No one knows the real name or word for *manito*.

This means, effectively, that the context of using *manito* will determine what meaning it is to have. When it is used in a list of words like this, where the context seems to imply a spiritual entity, *manito* obviously refers to a spirit or a spiritual being. Thus every context will bequeath a certain meaning to the use of *manito*. It can have no identifiable meaning standing alone, without some kind of context. So *manito* cannot refer only to a vague sense of mysterious power.

On the other hand, *manito* can appear in complex situations that point to ultimacy. For example, in Cree awareness of reality, *manitoskatask* is connected to healing. If healing is considered "religious"

or part of the structure of ultimacy, then some form of mysterious reality is indicated by *manito*; can it be “primitive” and undifferentiated? Not very likely, since the context already makes *manito*’s connections complex. The word cannot then reflect the requirement placed upon it by the evolutionary model of the theorists.

As the elders insist, then, no one kind of ontological being or object is said to “represent” it. *Manito* is talking about reality, but one cannot define that reality in terms of any directly-observable referent. *Manito* is just too encompassing to be limited so. This means that it is technically not even exhausted in symbolic terms, that is, for example, the symbolic meaning of God in Western religious tradition cannot be made to be the foundational way in which *manito* as a root has functioned in Cree discourse. To change this into the language of the theorists today, *manito* is (generally-speaking) part of several important discourses in Cree cultural life, the *parole*, as distinguished from the *langue* of Saussure.<sup>15</sup> The difference seems to be that Cree people today regard *manito* also to be *langue* in some situations too.

Thus, the word is found in discourses that note a superior quality and beauty in the universe, so it is indicating a basic perception of the Cree about reality. So, at one level, the word is saying “we see and feel a greatness, a beauty, a superior goodness around us, and we hold that these qualities are rooted in the way the universe is, and we call that *manito*. Such notions mean that the word cannot be construed as unsophisticated, nor as minimalist, as our early theorists had construed.

The matter is complicated in another way. The Cree do not hold words to be very solid—they move around in a conceptual universe, and *manito* is one word that may move a great deal. Thus many Cree today, including those who are traditionalists, who in other things reject Christian ideology, do not find it objectionable that Jesus Christ is referred to as *manitowokosisan* or *the Son of God*. Even this evident

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<sup>15</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. W. Barkin, New York: Duckworth, 1983 (orig. French ed. 1916).

Christian interpolation, can be accepted. All this says is that *manito* can be represented in a way that Christians find compatible. This suggests that however *manito* is to be construed, it can be understood to encompass God appearing in the flesh as insisted in Christian doctrine, as well as in a plant used for healing. This may be saying far more than *manito* may have meant three hundred years ago, since there was no mythological element of *manito* having any such equivalent before the coming of Christianity. That it does so today indicates for the Cree the malleability of their language and the acknowledgement that time may change what a word can invoke. Such flexibility allows it to encompass several meanings. Indeed it might not be too much to say that the Cree word *manito* can be an instructive instrument for our nebulous word "religion"—there is a certain focus of meanings, but these can be adjusted as required by theory or convention.

This does not solve the problem, however. For while theorists in religion may be content to relegate *manito* to the collection of "nice" but conceptually unreliable words, the Cree people go on using *manito* as though it says something concrete . . . whatever else belongs to it, *manito* definitely belongs to the domain identified with religion in the West. So it now has a history of being associated with this, and not even the most vigorous revisionism would argue for their divorce. That is, clearly the people who originally translated *manito* knew that God was not a good translation, even though *kihchimanito* does constitute an important Algonquin concept, and the Cree people freely use it in Christian discourse.<sup>16</sup> Rather it is within this context, that is, within some kind of non-specific god-language, that *manito* may have been first suggested as a very primitive form of god-awareness, and that may be the reason why *manito* was used by the early theorists in

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<sup>16</sup> See Earle H. Waugh, *Dissonant Worlds: Roger Vandersteene among the Cree*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996, 89, 135, etc. One of the first translations in an Algonquin dialect is that of first missionaries who wrote the famous Christmas carol: Jean de Brebeuf, *The First Canadian Carol* (circa 1641), n.p.: Provincial Paper Ltd., 1955. *Kitchimanito* is referred to in the text as the word for God. A nuanced treatment, but still not a systematic view is to be found in Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway*, Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1995.

the way it was. There is a very solid tradition of Cree people having an awareness of an underlying reality that takes on different forms and can be represented in different ways dependent upon the gifts of insight within the people. This would appear to be where Western commitments to worship of the gods as essential to religion won the day, especially from the Christian theological perspective, and perhaps even from the anthropological.

However, *manito* is larger than god-language, dealing with notions of undifferentiated power, authority, spirit resources, even “medicines” in the Cree sense of healing provisions. As current holy men indicate, each of these “manifestations” are possible as presentations of what *manito* is, and indeed may fit better at some times than others, but none are “superior” to the other, and all are “revelatory” as Christians understand that word. These kinds of statements put us clearly in a Cree theological environment that is uncomfortable in pinning words to concepts. In today’s parlance, *manito* is available for manifold constructions, but only in a recognized contextual situation, that is, *manito* is not normally utilized in language other than one that has what we would call “the sacred” involved. There is even something like a reluctance to use *manito*-type language apart from a ritual situation, and then only as a cognate form, such as *kihci-manito*. This is where *manito* takes on the manifold religious meanings that the Cree people deeply respect, we might even say, its most “proper” form.

It might be helpful to examine some of these, especially the more important in the *Dictionary*. Let us consider one arena of discourse that relates to the constitutive forms of reality in the universe; this reality is understood to be expressed through the existence of two opposing forces, *kihci-manito* and *maci-manito*. These opposing forces are revealed in all manner of data as a quick look at words with the root form *maci* will attest:

*maci-manito*: the great negative mystery or quality in the universe (translated by Christians as Satan or the devil)

*macayiwiwin*: the act of being contemptible

*macayiwiwin*: the act of doing evil

*maceyimew*: s/he despises her/him; s/he thinks s/he is bad  
*macikastewin*: the act of being full of pep, i.e. a wild horse  
*macikosisan*: an evil son  
*macikwanasa*: ragweed; house refuge (garbage) weeds; dusty  
*macimakwan*: it smells badly  
*macimamitoneyihikan*: an evil mind  
*macipayiwin*: unfortunate circumstances  
*macistikwanewin*: the act of being obstinate; the act of being hard-headed; balky;  
 ornery  
*macisayawin*: being depraved, devious

At the same time, there is another, symmetrically-positive discourse present when we examine *kihcyanito*:

*kihcyanito (kiseymanito)*: the great positive power or quality in the universe;  
 God  
*kihceyimew*: s/he has great esteem for people; s/he thinks a lot of people  
*kihceyimow*: the act of thinking highly of oneself; snooty  
*kihcihtwawan*: it is holy  
*kihcihtwawisitaw*: s/he makes it sacred or holy  
*kihcikamiy*: a very large body of water, i.e. ocean or sea  
*kihcikisk*: heaven  
*kihcipikiskwew*: s/he makes an oath  
*kihciwawmare*: the Blessed Virgin

Cree conceptual systems do not understand *kihci* (sometimes transliterated as *kise*) and *maci* as constituting separate “beings”; they really describe a way in which the foundational reality of the universe, *manito*, is rendered into the experience of the people. *Manito* is comprehended through two different kinds of living encounters. One of these is understood to encompass the negative side of the universe, the other the positive. Thus, wherever one stands in a situation, one will experience both aspects of the universe’s qualitative gifts—experienced as the case may be, either in a good way or evil. It is, therefore, legitimate to argue that *manito* can be known through some differentiating means . . . thus the Christian notion of God incarnate in Jesus is a possible way of encountering one aspect of *manito*—but it does not exhaust *manito* to say that, for that only conceptualizes some aspects of the positive side of the picture. From the perspective

of traditional Cree understanding, then, the conceptual formulation of *manito* has to be larger and more complicated than the Christian idea of God, for even apart from the limitation implied by “being,” *manito* encompasses absolute evil too.

All this is held to be traditional understanding. But it is impossible now to tell if *manito* always played this foundational role, or if it has been raised to its position because of the influence of Christian ideas of God upon the original cultural worldview. Like the analysis of religion, then, *manito* has the problem of being part of Western analytic traditions, and that may demand more of it than it originally had, and make it increasingly difficult to affirm what it is without taking that discourse into consideration.

There is another important distinction, if we are to rely on what contemporary elders say: *manito* is not the language that most ordinary people use when they talk about non-human or spirit beings, especially those regarded as having power. These belong to the realm of spirit beings, such as ancestral spirits, or spirits encountered in dreams or visions or in journeys to the spirit world. From what we can tell, then, *manito* only functions in a very distant manner within the concrete religious and cultural life of the people. One does not, for example, have visions of *manito*, but rather of the grandfathers, or some animal spirit. Forms are encounterable from within certain kinds of concrete discourse and these shape the experiential. *Kihcimanito* is probably better related to what we mean when we say “My, what a beautiful day,” by which we are not referring to the day of the week itself, nor to the weather necessarily, but to a package of good things occurring on a specific day. It is the whole experience of life during that time and at that place. When we say this, we are then responding to the *kihcimanito* reality of our life, a life that *kihcimanito* composes.

What does *manito* tell us about Cree religion? Probably not much. It is true that *manito* is central to religious discourse, and it functions as one centre of pious awareness. But rituals and mythic expressions are not limited to the notion, and much valuable religious activity takes place without direct reference to any *manito* words. From my

discussion with the elders, we may not even be able to privilege *manito* in our quest to determine either the mythic or ritual lodestone of Cree religious traditions. *Manito*'s position underscores many recent studies that problematize the defining of religion, especially by reference to one kind of phenomenon or a "standard" evolutionary system of religion.<sup>17</sup> As Taylor says, "Religion is about what is always slipping away."<sup>18</sup> *Manito* appears to express the same problematic.

*Issue Two: Classification of Shamanism*

Of all the functionaries in Aboriginal traditions around the world, none has generated the academic and popular interest as much as the shaman.<sup>19</sup> Given Eliade's ground-breaking work,<sup>20</sup> and the formative role the book has had on shamanism studies, the issue was an important one. Once again in the *Dictionary*, however, the linguistic and cultural usage of "shaman-type" words posed difficulties. Simply put, the term shaman is far more "loaded" in English than it is in Cree, so translating any potential term into English had to deal with the huge discrepancy between what should have been equivalent terms.

Nor was this just a matter of selecting the best word to which to apply shamanism. The shaman exists and works within a cultural system that defines meanings differently than the general Western con-

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<sup>17</sup> See Armin W. Geertz, "Definition as Analytical Strategy in the Study of Religion," *Historical Reflections / Reflexions historiques* 25 (1999) 445-475; Benson Saler, "Family Resemblance and the Definition of Religion," *ibid.* 391-404; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 269-284.

<sup>18</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 1. How far theory of religion has moved can be judged by comparing this treatment with James Thrower, *Religion: The Classical Theories*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Some gauge of the extent can be gleaned by perusing the website at [www.shamanicdimensions.com](http://www.shamanicdimensions.com) where there are over 26 pages of bibliography.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. R. Trask, New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964. Originally published in French as *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, Paris: Librairie Payot, 1951.

ceptual system concerning health, and it is precisely that problematic that complicates any translation. In addition, Cree tradition does not classify healers and specialists of transformation as if they were only medicine-type people, (using medicine here in the Western sense of physician and doctor), because ordinary well-being is regarded as good medicine. This means that the category of health and wellness reaches beyond physical health to what we would call psychological and even spiritual health. To make matters more complicated, well-being within Aboriginal teachings have mythic and/or cosmic dimensions, since health involves the ancestral and spirit world at certain key junctures—one can never be well if part of one's spirit nature has been stolen or lost while journeying within the spirit world, as often takes place in dreams and trances.

In order to demonstrate the problem, the following will review key words translated as shaman, and then discuss the religious etymology:

*awiyak kamamahtawisit: shaman*

*okosapahcikew: a conjurer, a shaman*

*mamahtawisiwin: shamanism*

*maskihkiyiniw: doctor, someone who heals illness, i.e. a medicine man or shaman*

*maskihkiyiniwiw: s/he has many spirit power gifts; s/he is a shaman*

All these words refer to professionals dedicated to special gifts for the community.

Eliade had identified the shaman as the master of ecstasy, that is, in the performance of his role, he goes into a trance and journeys to the spirit world. He insisted that the shaman's ability to do spirit travel was the key to his identity. It was precisely his/her excellence in this role that gained him/her the respect and admiration, and established community status. Eliade drew his model from the Tungus people in Siberia, and clearly thought that the shamanistic structure was most purely represented there; the implication is, then, that some form of diffusion or trajectory of influence was to be read in the data.

Even if we discount the diffusion issue, we have a problem in squaring the data we encountered in establishing the *Dictionary*. In

the first place, the root form, which is evident in all but one of the words translated as “shaman,” denotes something other than a master of ecstasy or trance journey. For example, it is far more apt that one hears this sentence about the shaman rather than one dealing with trance:

*Ana kamamahtawisit oki nakânahk kimowan*

It was the person with special powers who was able to stop the rain.

*Mamah* indicates relatedness to spirits; it implies the ability to work with the spirits in the spirit world in order to bring about some impact in this world, such as stop the downpour of rain. The key here is demonstration of powers, not of a peculiar kind of behaviour. The shaman is recognized because s/he has the power to alter the natural order. One hears:

*Na moyah pokwan âwiyah emikosit mamatawsiwin*

Not just anyone is given special powers (i.e. spirits helpers)

It does not necessarily imply trance, although some forms of trance are evident at times.

On the other hand, the second group with root *maskih* means something else.

*Maskihkiwîniw-a poko kaki nâtowihik*

It will require a medicine person with certain knowledge that will heal him/her

As George Cardinal suggested, *maskih* suggests someone who heals by the rules of nature and plants: “Basically, *maskih* means what you white people would call a pill-pusher type of doctor. If you had a headache he would give you the Cree plant equivalent of aspirin.” Both these root forms imply status, just as Eliade identified in the shamanic complex. But then the issue of status is not just based on the ability to journey in trance. It also is based upon the social level of acceptance among the people. It is important to note Neils Braroe’s point about respect in a Plains Cree society:

The degree of sacredness possessed by any person in a given situation with respect to others present depends on a great many factors, all of which enter into the prevailing definitions of the situation. Rank and status, familiarity

or formality, and convention settings and occasions of interaction all influence both the varieties of regard persons extend to one another and the resulting social distance between them. Whatever the degree of respect actually offered or demanded, respect itself is necessarily a component of every social interaction.<sup>21</sup>

Thus while Eliade's concept seems to ride upon the priority of the religious trance, what actually happens in Canadian Cree communities is much more diffuse. For example, Craig Candler found that the interest and commitment to "native" ceremonial (as an expression of revitalization and nativism) in a religiously diverse Cree community played an important role in the power and healing ability of a traditional medicine man in present-day northern Alberta.<sup>22</sup> Some Cree people, fully persuaded by evangelical Christianity refused to grant the healer legitimacy, but accepted his ritual as part of Cree culture. Even beyond that, it is possible to argue convincingly that shamanism is not specifically "religious," but closer to that of a procedural regimen, as the use of "techniques" in Eliade's title indicates. In the Cree case, the healer is much more a broadly defined doctor-counsellor than a religiously-validated specialist/priest.

The final word, *okosapahcikew*, is worth separate consideration, because, in some ways this term is closer to Eliade's definition than the others. A literal translation of this word is "person who deals directly with the spirits, whether they be good or bad." It is the word usually associated with the shaking tent rite, the powerful conjuring ceremonial that is found in many northern Canadian communities, and still is practised today. It is understood to be very dangerous, because the conjurer's power can be lost if s/he is unsuccessful in challenging the spirits, particularly if the spirits are considered evil. The notorious spirit wars, that is, spiritual battles waged between one shaman and another, are carried out by two or more *okosapahcikew*. Journeying

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<sup>21</sup> Neils Winther Braroe, *Indian & White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975, 33-34.

<sup>22</sup> Craig Candler, *Healing and Cultural Formation*, unpublished M.A. thesis, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Alberta, 1999.

may be a feature of this rite, since the implication is that the shaman must leave the little tent while in a trance-like state in search of the lost item or lost soul or evil spirit. It should, however, be pointed out that the rite is carried out in a darkened tent, so no one can see whether trance is, in fact, involved.

It is true that the *okosapahcikew* is a kind of last resort healer, so the word does, more or less, reflect the Eliadean notion that the trance-type shaman has a certain top-range prestige. Still the possessor of these gifts was not and is not regarded as necessarily the best healer. Not all healing needs this kind of healer. While soul-loss is a major cause for illness, the search by a shaman for the wandering soul-element need not, in the first instance, require spirit searching...it might just require mild stimulation to have the soul return fully. The *okosapahcikew* was traditionally regarded as a very rough and vigorous kind of healing practice. One did not use this unless it was absolutely necessary. Otherwise, as George Cardinal commented, "You could be firing a howitzer when a dart might work."

On the other hand, the shaman may not be able to bring back a person, either because the shaman's powers have been depleted through moral or spiritual abuse, or the individual is "too far on the spirit trail to bring back." So the *okosapahcikew* did not lose face or status if s/he was not successful; everyone knew there were limitations to all gifts and no one understood everything.

The more contextually representative understanding of the Cree community, then, would reflect a very diverse field of healing practitioner. The shaman is/was just one of several gifted people in a community, as this list for the *Dictionary* demonstrates:

*okakiskihkwehikewin: prophet or person who predicts the future*

*okisiwehikew: a person who speaks out about what the future holds (i.e. close to a preacher), largely on the basis of dreams*

*maskihkiiwiyiniw: a person who doctors, or a medicine person*

*maskihkiwiskwew: a medicine woman or nurse*

*otoyawascikew: a psychic; someone who has a feeling something is going to happen; someone with "second sight"*

*nanatawihewiyinow: a person who uses good spirits to offset evil spirits*

*onotawehiwew: a person who cures everything (from a boil to mental depression—a kind of general practitioner*

*oyiyinihiwew: a person who makes you feel better about yourself and things around you (something like a psychological counsellor or counselling pastor)*

*astehowew: a healer (mother may be a healer of this sort by placing a bandaid); a person who is able to balance the system; someone who provides a helping hand in need*

*asomew: s/he puts a curse on her/him*

In the richly endowed Cree community, various combinations of these abilities would flourish. It was understood that one person would never have them all and that the community needed different kinds of healing technicians. Moreover, too many gifts in one person might be extremely dangerous for the community, since that person would have powers that were not properly balanced with social constraints. The notion of balance, thus, is crucial in understanding the way specialists function.

In sum, a shaman may trance, but not necessarily, and a shaman may heal, but only under certain conditions. Thus the category is far more flexible than would appear to be present in Eliade's structuring of the phenomenon. His emphasis is clearly on the experience of the shaman as indicator of legitimacy; the Cree insistence is on what is produced by the specialist. It is best to accept a basket of notions that might apply and determine which would fit the particular scenario. This leads us to our final issue.

### *Issue Three: The Problem of Religious/Cultural Definition.*

In 1974, Sister Nancy LeClaire undertook to develop a Cree Dictionary. She was a Plains Cree speaker from Hobbema, Alberta, a reserve with considerable oil and gas revenues southeast of Edmonton. The Cree language is part of the Algonquin language group, which is the largest and most widespread of all Canadian Aboriginal language groups, with speakers reaching from Vancouver, B.C. to Labrador, and from Fort Smith in the Northwest Territories to the northern States in the United States, an area considerably larger in size than Europe. In recent years, the retention of Aboriginal Languages has been almost

in free-fall, largely as a result of assimilation pressures by both government and religious organizations, but also by the incursion of radio, television and other cultural media into even the remotest parts of Canada. The crisis this has spawned for Aboriginal culture has raised a host of responses, among which was Sister Nancy's.

Translation depends upon sufficient constructional similarities that words gather up at least some of the contingent meanings in both cultures. But such a notion views words as ciphers for a reality that can be grasped or demonstrated. Such a notion tends to favour Greek models of words and reality, or at least Plato's notions. What happens when the systems are not compatible with this?

As developed in the *Dictionary*, the Cree system is based on balance, a belief that all ingredients encountered in human experience are rightfully part of the universe and that each has a place in it. What governs the varied elements is the belief that there is no surfeit of bad, nor an excess of good. Keeping them all in some kind of balance is the stuff of existence, and one needs assistance from every level of reality that one knows in order to be successful at this. When everything is in perfect balance, then one finds health and happiness. We could call this a philosophy of balance.

The philosophy of balance means that the universe can be unhealthy as well as a person or society. Nature has tornadoes as well as magnificent sunsets. If too many things are out of balance in the universe, the unbalance works itself out in pain and extended repercussions until some sense of balance is maintained again. The Cree philosophy of life accepts that the chaotic and the organized must live together. Too many tornadoes occurring indicate that there is imbalance in the system.

Health is therefore not a stable state of being, but a continuous process, requiring constant care and vigilance. It also means that both the moral order and the *modus operandi* of the universe do not guarantee human well-being. The universe does not revolve around what humans want. Therefore, humans must develop a sense of attunement to the ebbs and flows of nature to determine how best to situate themselves for a healthy, happy life.

Several implications are entailed by this view:

1. Problematizing what we have said above about *manito* and religion, the “philosophy of balance” is also “religious.” So the analytic concept of religion favoured by Western theorists, and the focus for a wide range of behaviours and notions about ultimacy, *cannot be isolated in Cree vocabulary*. Such a complicated notion as this has to resort to a wide variety of ways of depicting it, none of which could be taken as absolute in Cree.
2. Religion is almost always translated in the *Dictionary* by words that are all specifically related to Christianity, viz: *ayamihawin*, pl. *ayamihcikewak*: *Christian praying; Christian prayer; Christian religion, a group of Christian prayers, i.e. a litany*. No other general word for religion operates within the Cree system in the *Dictionary*. There is *isihcikewin*, a large banquet or resource that is then combined with *kihci* (i.e. implying “good”) to mean ceremonial, that is, *kihci isihcikewin* is to carry out a community-wide sacred activity. We might want to call this religious, but it is not identified as a *species* of this more universal *genera* in the Cree system.
3. Still, it is clear that our word religion *per se* in Cree is understood as a certain kind of litany or praying, in short a specific kind of religious activity. All words relating to praying, supplication, exorcism, and Christian spirituality have the same *ayamih* root. Does that make them Christian in origin? The Cree people say no. Once again words are slippery. The only other word to have this root is “to read,” suggesting that the root underwent development in response to the Christian practice of reading from prayer books, a special kind of activity that set Christians apart from other significant individuals in the Cree cultural world. Our word “faith” is expressed in Cree as a sense of confidence in or the usefulness of something. *Apateyihtamowin* is rendered as hope; creed or articles, and the verbal form *apateyimew* means “s/he has faith in her/him” or “s/he feels s/he has use for her/him or it.” Such a notion reduces greatly the scope of faith in English, and renders it almost functional in meaning, clearly a problem

in trans-cultural conceptualization. It is probable that the word developed out of the root *apac/apat* which means having a practical purpose for one's activity, as, for example, in the word *apachisiw*: *s/he cures her/him; s/he helps her/him; s/he utilizes her/him effectively*.

4. Concepts differ remarkably, too, for ideas like health. *Miyomah-cihowewin* depends for its meaning system upon the *miyo* prefix which designates well-being, pleasantness, good-hearted, benevolence, fertile, attractiveness, entertaining, good weather, even perfection. Such a wide range of meanings indicates that Cree resists too close a rendering of meanings for one word, relying rather on a range of ideas to be associated with health.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing upon these materials, we would have to admit that Cree words oppose any attempt to give them a fixed designation, since the meaning of a word has to arise from the way it is used in a conversation and/or regular usage. For Cree this is the concrete bed upon which language is built. The consequence of this is that our word religion is not to be found in the Cree lexicon, and the closest word we find to it is specific to one religion, apparently suggesting that those words arose when the Cree first encountered Christians. Indeed, a wide variety of Cree terms would be needed to encompass what the History of Religions has denoted as "religion," including some that are knowingly related to witchcraft and spirit manipulation.

The result is a strange similarity between the word religion and the word dictionary. The word dictionary is impossible to translate, since Cree, as we have noted, has no concept of one word having one meaning, or contrariwise, one word being reduced to a fixed set of meanings (we used *otwestamakewasinahikan* or "list of meanings" as our way of describing it in the title.) Religion in Western academic tradition may turn out to be very much like dictionary in Cree tradition—handy to designate a range of meanings, but without any fixed meaning in itself.

The survey we have undertaken here indicates how significant cultural and linguistic differences are for the History of Religions. For example, key religious words in *The Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary* reflects, then, how flimsy the original definition of *manito*, etc. was from the perspective of the Algonquin language system, but it is old news to say that the conceptualization structure for the meaning of *manito* depended upon a western culture-centric view of the meaning of *manito*, for we have seen that there is a sense of ultimacy in *manito*, even if it is too diversified to be restricted to god-consciousness. Still, missionaries were not necessarily wrong to translate their most powerful religious terms by *manito*, for that word does relate to the foundational meanings of the cosmos. I have not yet come upon a convincing analysis of Cree theological systems,<sup>23</sup> so one has to assume that that enterprise will fail too, given the flexibility of Cree descriptors.

Moreover, it also indicates that translation from one language system to another has fundamental problems in dealing with religious concepts, precisely because those concepts deal with foundational ingredients in a culture's values. While it does not render comparison across cultural systems impossible, it does suggest that any affirmation as to religion's character is more apt to be culturally generated than objectively established. Moreover, it places severe restriction on attempts to define religion in terms of the comparison of cultural systems, such as one finds regularly in anthropological work. For the History of Religions, it is clearly a problem to utilize the term "religion" when no consensus exists among scholars as to what bundle of elements will be included when the term is used; this may restrict its usefulness in analysis, but it will open studies of specific traditions, like the Cree, to provide its own bundle.

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<sup>23</sup> Despite much talk of the Great Spirit, I am not convinced this is any more than a symbolic gesture to relate Cree spirituality to Christian doctrine. Hultkrantz surveys the early theories in *The Study of American Indian Religions*, ed. Christopher Vecsey, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983, 1-15.

Secondly, the classification of such things as shamanism is certainly due for revision. Eliade's views of the normativeness of the Siberian shaman's trance is not replicated in the Cree case. Rather, far more democratic notions of obtaining well-being and the specialists that offer it obtain. Even more, it is not evident on the basis of the linguistic structures of the Plains and Woodlands dialects found in our part of the world that tranced journeys are the paramount and crucial healing strategies implied by his evaluation. Rather, a collection of gifts and the way they are utilized by a given medicine man/woman, including, of course, the handling of the spirit world, is determinative for Cree community designation of shaman. And clearly one kind of healer is not superior to another on the basis of a Cree culture. Nor, incidentally, can Cree shamanism be limited to healing only, as the much-discussed neo-shamanism of Harner and his school would suggest.<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, the Cree material tells us that the way we define religion sets up the scales of interpretation. It is no great revelation that Cree does not interpret religion the same way as we do in Western culture, but one might argue that the closest we come to our complex known as religion is the Cree philosophy of balance. Yet this idea has no equivalent to the "revealed" beliefs in Western tradition, and is more or less an intuited sense derived from the Cree perception of the universe and life experience. It follows then that the religious leadership might be responsible for determining what is meant by that sense of balance—technically no cultural or religious definition could be given, but everyone must be responsible for pursuing it.

It follows then, that the way elements of the Cree religious system are understood—like *manito* or shaman or faith—will all depend upon experiences of a "gift"-specified kind, and their acceptance by a culture. This makes it very difficult to develop either a publically-acknowledged religious history, or a publicly-approved "science of

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<sup>24</sup> See Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power Healing*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980, and Sandra and Michael Harner's website <http://www.ciis.edu/conted/program.html>.

religion,” despite the arguments of recent scholarship.<sup>25</sup> The quandary that it leaves for one trained in the History of Religions is obvious.

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<sup>25</sup> See *Historical Reflections / Reflexions Historiques* 20 (1994):335-495, where History, Historiography and the History of Religions is discussed by Ernest Breisach, Kurt Rudolph, Hans G. Kippenberg, Carsten Colpe, Michel Despland, Arthur McCalla, Gary Lease, and E. Thomas Lawson.

## BOOK REVIEWS

SIGURD HJELDE (ed.), *Man, Meaning, and Mystery: Hundred Years of History of Religions in Norway. The Heritage of W. Brede Kristensen*—Leiden: E.J. Brill 2000 (xii + 301 p.) ISBN 90-04-11497-1 US\$ 105.00.

This volume presents the essays read at an international symposium in Oslo (17-20 September, 1998) held in celebration of the centenary of the establishment of the History of Religions as an academic enterprise in Norway and in honour of W. Brede Kristensen's legacy to that enterprise. The title of the volume, as the editor puts it, is intended "to capture concisely some of the interests that in particular characterise ... [W. Brede Kristensen's] work in the field of history of religions" (xii), but the subtitle more clearly captures the intention of the symposium organizers to provide some account of the development of the History of Religions as an academic undertaking in Norway and the significance of Kristensen as a pioneer in that Norwegian enterprise. Given that Kristensen spent his academic life in Leiden from 1901 onwards, a strong Dutch element was included in the symposium which is seen not only in the thorough treatment of the early Dutch science of religion by Arie Molendijk in Part One of the volume, but also in the various treatments of the programme and problems of the phenomenology of religion in Part Three, and, to some extent, in Jacques Waardenburg's treatment of the problem of religious meanings in the concluding chapter of the volume (Part Five). Seven of the fourteen essays in this volume deal directly with Kristensen's work; the four essays in Part Two (by Hultgård, Naguib, Bremmer, and Braarvig) treat his study of ancient religions, and the essays by Carman and Hofstee in Part Three deal with his views on the phenomenology of religion. And Sigurd Hjelde's essay in Part Four provides a helpful biographical outline of Kristensen's early Norwegian academic career. The two largely thematic essays by Gilhus on the phenomenology of religion in Part Three, and Jacques Waardenburg's essay on research on religious meaning are somewhat tangential to the themes of the symposium, although Waardenburg's essay is intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the work of the history of religions in the twentieth century in the sense that the essays by Kippenberg, Molendijk, and Skogar in Part One are meant

to provide a kind of overview of the History of Religions in Europe in the nineteenth century as a backdrop for developments in the History of Religions in the Scandinavian countries, and especially in Norway.

In addition to providing information about the research interests of Kristensen, and the development of the History of Religions in Norway (and other Scandinavian countries), and of Kristensen's role in that development, many of these essays present arguments about the nature of the History of Religions that carry far broader import and will be of general interest to students of religion.

Hans G. Kippenberg's essay, "Explaining Modern Facts by Past Religions" is the first of the three contributions to Part One on "History of Religions in Europe Towards the End of the 19th Century." R.R. Marett, Kippenberg argues, transformed the scholarly approach to the study of religion in arguing that religion is not essentially a response to the intellectual need or desire for an explanation of the world, but rather is a primordial experience of power. This understanding, he further maintains, was taken up in Germany by Otto (also influenced by Schleiermacher) and others who insisted that "[o]nly by means of its [i.e. religion's] elucidation as a primary given of life can it be made accessible to consciousness" (8). In the process of this transformation, then, religion came to be seen as an independent area of human existence; it became an autonomous system that embraced "a power turning the believer into a subject independent of the outer world" (11). And understood in this way, religion could not then be studied as a simple object of nature but required rather that it be treated as an expression of interior experience. Clearly that transformation of the notion of religion had a significant impact on the field of the History of Religions.

Arie L. Molendijk's contribution on "Early Dutch Science of Religion in International Perspective" raises some very interesting questions regarding the origin of the scientific study of religion in Holland by challenging the widely held belief that the science of religion was the result of "a gradual emancipation from the patronizing power of theology" by virtue of the 1876 Dutch Act of Higher Education (21). He maintains that in this early period "there was no specific Dutch science of religion school" (24), although he does acknowledge that despite the dominance of theology, "[t]he scientific character of the study of religion was very important to these early scholars" (40). Nevertheless, according to Molendijk, even though van der Leeuw established the phenomenology of religion as a kind of scientific approach to

the study of religion, that enterprise really in effect canonized the “connection between theology and science” (48). Indeed, he maintains—no doubt correctly so—that this connection, as that between *Religionswissenschaft* and missiology in some Dutch theological faculties, is precisely what made it possible for the scientific study of religion to flourish (50).

Björn Skogar’s paper on “Neoprotestantism in Stockholm in 1897,” showing that this Congress—inspired by the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions held in Chicago—was essentially a manifestation of the modern theology of the time, reveals that a theological dominance in the study of religion existed not only in Holland but also in other Scandinavian countries.

Part Two of this volume, entitled “W. B. Kristensen and the Study of Religion,” reflects the shift in attention at the symposium from the broad European stage on which the History of Religions emerged, to the early development of the discipline in Norway. Anders Hultgård’s “The Study of the Avesta and Its Religion Around the Year 1900 and Today,” traces the history of the philological progress in the study of the Avesta and its contribution to the work of historians of religion like Edvard Lehmann, Nathan Söderblom, W.B. Kristensen in understanding the religion of the Avesta. Saphinaz-Amal Naguib’s “Lieblein, Kristensen, and Schencke and the Quest for Egyptian Monotheism” shows both Kristensen and Schencke to have abandoned theology for a history of religions approach to the study of Egyptian religion. Jan N. Bremmer, on the other hand, (in his essay, “W. B. Kristensen and the Religions of Greece and Rome”), notes, that despite the possibility open to Kristensen to make a lasting contribution to our knowledge and understanding of these ancient religions, Kristensen became stuck in a not very fruitful hermeneutical and ahistorical approach to the data. Bremmer argues, moreover, that Kristensen was not familiar with the whole of the then available evidence about these religious traditions, and that he avoided opening himself up to criticism through attendance at international conferences or by publishing his work in refereed journals. His interests, Bremmer hints, appear more inspired by a reverence and nostalgia for the ancient religions than by a scientific understanding of them. Jens E. Braarvig (in “W. B. Kristensen’s Concept of ‘Life out of Death’”) similarly notes that a “poetical dimension is also part of Kristensen’s own writings and somehow seems to have a certain preponderance over the analytic aspects of his phenomenological work” (133), although Braarvig himself believes that the notion of “Life out of Death” is not only a helpful notion for reflecting

on life generally but is also still relevant to the discipline of Religious Studies.

John B. Carman's "Modern Understanding of Ancient Insight" which opens Part Three of this volume—"Phenomenology of Religion: Programme and Problems"—deals with Kristensen's belief that to understand primitive wisdom we require a spiritual affinity to those ancient religious traditions. Kristensen, he writes, shares with his Leiden successors "a confidence in the existence of a divine reality and a general human capacity to respond to it" (170), and he claims that Kristensen therefore thought that "an intuitive understanding is crucial to the style of scholarship we call history and phenomenology of religion" (171).

Willem Hofstee's paper on "The 'Groningen School' 1920-1970" also presents Kristensen as critical of scientific rationalism and partial to the science of religion as an interpretative undertaking. Hofstee rejects the criticisms of the phenomenology of religion raised by Fokke Sierksman and Theo van Baaren, and concludes his analysis of the phenomenologies of Kristensen and van der Leeuw by claiming that "[t]his interpretative approach has without doubt brought problems of understanding religion closer to a solution" (188). In "The Phenomenology of Religion: An Ideal and Its Problems" Ingvild Sælid Gilhus also argues that the ideal of a phenomenological approach to religion—i.e., its "scrupulous reverence for facts combined with a genuinely sympathetic understanding of the believer . . ." (194)—is scientifically acceptable, but she also claims that its ethical character allows questions of the truth of religion to emerge that, problematically, catapult the discipline on to a metaphysical level. Whereas some might think of phenomenology as a paradigm for the study of religion, Gilhus nevertheless maintains that it is more metaphor than a scientific concept. Gilhus does not deny that it might possibly be fruitful in the study of religion, but suggests that given its assumption of religion as a *sui generis* phenomenon, and its call for a sympathetic attitude towards religion, phenomenology constitutes surreptitious support for religion. Consequently Gilhus suggests that the loss of phenomenology of religion as a part of the scientific approach to the study of religion ought not to be lamented.

Part Four—"Scandinavian Pioneers of the History of Religions"—contains three essays. The first, "From Kristiansand to Leiden: The Norwegian Career of W. Brede Kristensen," by Sigurd Hjelde, as noted above, provides a brief biographical sketch of Kristensen's contribution to the early develop-

ment of the History of Religions in Norway. And Tove Tybjerg's analysis of the contributions of Hans Sofus Vodskov and Vilhelm Grønbech (the successor to Edvard Lehmann in Copenhagen) in "The Introduction of History of Religions As an Academic Discipline in Denmark" reveals a commitment to the methods of philology and anthropology rather than comparative studies or the phenomenology on the part of the early Danish scholars in the field.

Einar Thomassen's "Wilhelm Schencke, Norway's First Professor in History of Religions" is a delightfully playful piece on the importance of Schencke—who, we are told, is largely forgotten by his successors and who left virtually no intellectual legacy to the field—to the development of the History of Religions in Norway. Despite the meagreness of his output of original scholarship, Thomassen argues that Schencke personified a "style" in doing the history of religions that has had lasting effects. This, claims Thomassen, is clearly evident in the articles he wrote for the general public on the importance of the scientific study of religions. As Thomassen puts it, Schencke "caused the chair of the history of religions to be placed within the faculty of arts, and not in the faculty of theology. In consequence, the discipline remained in that faculty and came to acquire its identity as an indisputably independent discipline and one of the human sciences" (226).

The battle between Schencke and the theologians, as Thomassen puts it, reveals Schencke to be "methodologically quite healthy" (230); a conclusion with which I concur. Thomassen nevertheless, and quite surprisingly, concludes that in his battle with the theologians, Schencke revealed a naïvete about the dialectically interrelated natures of religion, theology, and the History of Religions, and that he therefore became bogged down in unnecessary and debilitating paradoxes in trying to exclude theology from the university. It is even more surprising to find Thomassen arguing that between the History of Religions and religion itself there is "a continuum of reflection on religion, including religion's reflection on itself as theology" (235), and his consequent support for theology as an academic enterprise in the university as an "undoubtedly . . . good thing" (234-235).

The final section of this volume, entitled "History of Religions Towards the End of the 20th Century," contains only Jacques Waardenburg's "Progress in Research on Meanings in Religions (1898-1998)." Focussing on research that takes religious meaning as central to understanding religion, Waardenburg

concludes that genuine development in the History of Religions has taken place since 1898. The study of religion over the last hundred years, he argues, has moved “from [being] a specific historical discipline (*Religionsgeschichte*) to a broader interdisciplinary field of research (*Religionswissenschaft*). . .” (255); it is now a “field” of scholarship rather than a specific discipline. According to Waardenburg, that is, “[t]here is no longer any ‘total’ approach to religion in general or even to one religion in particular” (256). Waardenburg further maintains that it has become clear over this period of time that questions of religious meaning cannot be left to the theologians or philosophers; this subjective dimension of religious data, he suggests, has begun to be seen as a realm capable of being understood on a “scholarly basis” and, therefore, is a fit subject for a specialized field of research.

Students of religion interested in the history of the development of their field will be grateful for this introduction to the emergence of the History of Religions in Norway and other Scandinavian countries. These accounts of the various aspects of the emergence and development of the field in Norway, have raised significant questions about the real subject matter of the study of religion and about the “ways and means” by which scholars can understand and explain the phenomena. The “supplementary” essays on the nineteenth-century intellectual context of the Norwegian experience, and on general developments in the History of Religions in the twentieth century, also provide significant stimulus not only to historians of the field of religious studies, but also to methodologists, for “rethinking” the nature of this academic enterprise.

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ANNEMARIE MERTENS, *Der Dakṣamythus in der episch-purāṇischen Literatur. Beobachtungen zur religionsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung des Gottes Rudra-Śiva im Hinduismus* (Beiträge zur Indologie 29)—Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1998 (xx, 443 p.) ISBN 3-447-04079-3 (pbk.) DM 148.00.

Nobody acquainted with Hindu anonymous literature (epics and Purāṇas) will be ignorant of the myth of Dakṣa in which the god Rudra(-Śiva), angered

for being excluded from Dakṣa's great sacrifice, destroys the sacrifice and wins Dakṣa as devotee. Many scholars have seen the myth as a reflection of an important change in the religious history of India: the transition of Vedism/Brāhmanism to classical Hinduism and the transformation of Rudra, who was in vedic times an ambivalent (awesome) god at the periphery of the pantheon, into the (mild and gracious) high god Śiva. It is therefore most welcome that A. Mertens has taken up the theme, comparing for the first time the vast amount of versions in order to reconstruct a relative chronology of the myth's (and the god's) development.

In applying the method of textual history introduced by P. Hacker 1959 the author traces (sometimes filigree) stages of development and transformations of meaning by systematizing core motives, additions and omissions, and working out the changing motivations for Śiva-Rudra's destructive action. Part 1 discusses vedic sources relating to Rudra's exclusion from sacrifice. Part 2 works out a differentiated chronology of the five Mahābhārata versions of the Dakṣa myth which document a growing emphasis on the god's gracious aspects and an early Rudra theology (monist concepts and Pāśupata observances). While the early epic versions record, according to A. Mertens, the discrimination (exclusion from brahmanical "orthodoxy") of early Rudra worshippers in late vedic times and their fight for recognition, the latter ones already reflect a stage in which Śaivism has attained (or seeks to attain) a "quasi monotheist" standing. Having added some major new elements they constitute the "core" for all subsequent Purāṇa versions: from the early (Part 3) up to the classical ones (Part 4). In the Purāṇas Rudra-Śiva has grown into a serious rival for Viṣṇu as variously reflected in the purāṇic Śaivaite, Vaiṣṇavaite and Smārta variants of the Dakṣa myth. Śākta versions, constituting the last stage (Part 5), shift the emphasis completely: goddess places of pilgrimage and iconic worship have become the central theme. In later Śākta variants Śiva appears subordinate to the Great Goddess who claims now the same exclusive status like Rudra once before. Part 6 summarizes the major findings.

With great care for details A. Mertens presents a fascinating history of the famous text, its transmutations and its appropriation by different Hindu religions. It is at once a history of Hinduism in process and a document of the rivalry between Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta and Smārta traditions. Each chapter is well introduced and connected with the previous one, the argumentation is tight, the extra information to important themes is rich. With astonishing

autonomy (considering the fact that it is her doctoral thesis) the author even boldly corrects well-known scholars (118, 138, 203, 233).

On the other hand much of her arguments depend on an extensive and too uncritical use of Hacker's concepts (*Inklusivismus*, *Substantialismus*). One may doubt whether she could have arrived at such an unilineal development without a presupposed fixed scheme of Śaivism etc. One misses a discussion of D. Srinivasan's refutation of Rudra's vedic outsider position and of A. Sanderson's studies on early Śaivism and Śāktism. The religious groups detected remain pale due to the restriction to texts and a history of ideas. But such weaknesses are minor, the general lines remain undisputed and the detail discussions are always highly informative. The book is very much worth reading. Even though written for indologists, it is also a valuable source for historians of religion.

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LIZ WILSON, *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. With a Foreword by CATHERINE R. STIMPSON—Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press 1996 (258 p.) ISBN 0-226-90054-1 (pbk.) US\$ 19.95.

The question whether discrimination against women and the female body in Buddhist texts has to be interpreted in the first place as a symptom of the subordination of women to men in Buddhism or rather as a skilful means to prevent male members of the order from breaking their vow of celibacy has long been an issue between feminist and non-feminist Buddhologists. With her book *Charming Cadavers*, Liz Wilson made a remarkable contribution towards more clarity in this field. She starts from the fact that the Buddha Gautama created, as part of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, a contemplation on the human body as inherently impure, decaying and dying in order to bring to the mind of his monks and nuns the ultimate transitoriness of human existence. The author shows how in Buddhist literature the object of this meditation was gradually changing from one's own body towards that of a

woman. Culminating in the Gupta age (4th to 6th century A.D.), the author diagnoses “a broad cross-section of hagiographic literature” in which “male protagonists become Arhats, or ‘worthy ones,’ through viewing dead, dying or disfigured female bodies,” gaining spiritual liberation by “viewing women as object lessons on the folly of desire” (p. 3).

Women in these stories tend to be shown through their bodies as representatives of and, moreover, as identical with *samsāra*, the painful cycle of death and rebirth from which the male seekers have to find liberation. Wilson demonstrates how women are thus reduced to the role of the “object of the male gaze” in the sense of Jean Paul Sartre (*Being and Nothingness*, New York, 1969, 228-78) who has stated that being in that role makes it nearly impossible for the person gazed at to feel and act as a conscious subject his- or herself.

There are, as Wilson admits, stories in Buddhist literature in which women themselves act as heroines, stories in which one could expect to find a female gaze on men in compensation. The author, however, rightly states that even stories about women “support rather than challenge my thesis that male subjectivity prevails in this body of literature” (p. 5), because in these stories as well, women are caused by the situation or even “instructed by male mentors” to take *their own* body as an object of meditation on transitoriness: not a male body (as some would expect), not “the body as such”, but an expressly *female* body. A woman is thus urged not to attempt to discover her own point of view, but to identify with the male subject’s gaze and thus with the continuing objectification of her own body. Following an expression by Paula Rabinowitz concerning feminist film theory (in *Feminist Studies*, 16 (1990), 151-69), Wilson identifies this process as “Seeing Through the Gendered ‘I’ ” (p. 12). Moreover, not only “seeing” is involved, but in some wellknown stories also autoaggression: e.g. when a woman threatened by male rape as a response mutilates herself to show the aggressor the inherent unattractiveness of her body.

The author concludes her book stating that this motive of “male edification achieved by means of female mortification” belongs to “a common stock of Buddhist story literature shared by all schools of the post-Aśokan period” (p. 184) and, as a result, makes it impossible to recognize, like other scholars, in Indian Buddhism “a gradual movement from gender-based discrimination to a mode of apprehension in which gender becomes irrelevant” (p. 193).

Wilson's book is written in a clear and rational style, expounding soberly her sources while avoiding any excessive conclusions drawn from her results. It should be read by anybody interested in gender studies in Buddhism or in the psychological background of Buddhist meditation practices.

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ADELHEID HERRMANN-PFANDT

MANFRED HUTTER, *Das ewige Rad. Religionen und Kultur des Buddhismus*—Graz, Wien, Köln: Verlag Styria 2001 (295 p.) ISBN 3-222-12862 (hb.) DM 39.80.

In the West, the ever-growing interest in things Buddhist has brought forth a multitude of smaller and larger publications on Buddhism. The author Manfred Hutter, succeeding the late Hans-Joachim Klimkeit as professor for the history of religions at the University of Bonn (Germany), thus rightly queries the need for yet another portrayal of Buddhist history, teaching and life in the book's introduction. In his account, Hutter emphasizes that Buddhist practices and concepts are deeply rooted in culture and history. By analysing the impressive variety of specific (local) interpretations which Buddhism has undergone within Asia's regional and cultural diversity, the author displays his comprehensive knowledge of Buddhism in all its divergent expressions and developments, from early India to modern Japan. Occasionally, however, this approach results in mere descriptive enumeration, to the detriment of analysis or theoretical interpretation.

The book consists of three equally divided parts. Part one provides a useful sketch of Buddhist teaching, history and its geographic distribution. The second part focuses on Buddhist life-style, cosmology and religiosity. Here we read of the various ritual and devotional forms which developed while adapting Buddhist ideals to Thai, Chinese or Japanese culture. In contrast to many other introductions, Buddhism is not primarily portrayed as a philosophical system generated by highly literate monks, but as a practised life support system, including the use of magical spells and amulets against malevolent spirits. Again, the emphasis is on explaining the historical and cultural background of these evolved syncretic manifestations. More insight into concrete Buddhist practice and individual devotion would have made

the monograph even more appealing. The book's third part is devoted to Buddhist developments during the twentieth century and the various reformist or innovative developments in South Asia and Japan. Finally, the spread of Buddhist practice and teaching beyond Asia is sketched with regard to the European situation. A glossary and selective bibliography for each chapter round off this well written book.

A conceptual caveat should not go unmentioned. The title "The Eternal Wheel" appears a little odd, for it misses central aspects of Buddhist self-understanding. The concept of "eternity" is alien to Buddhist teaching: The *dharma*, pedagogically explained as the "wheel of existence and rebirth" (*bhava cakra*), has existed since times immemorial and is here to stay in perpetuity. Superimposing Christian terms on Buddhist ideas and concepts can be puzzling and misleading in other contexts too: The Buddhist five ethical precepts (*pañcaśīla*) are straightforwardly called "Gebote" (commandments). Many Buddhists, however, strongly emphasize that these principles are not imposed rules but are to be followed, once fully understood, on a voluntary basis. Also, it would have been useful to explain that *bodhi*, the Buddha's understanding of the *dharma*, is not fully translated by the somewhat mystical term "Erleuchtung" (enlightenment). *Bodhi* derives from a gradual process of "awakening" just as the honorific title *buddha* ought to be rendered—at least once—as "Erwachter" (the awakened one), and not only as "the enlightened one". In this context the important question of translating terms from Sanskrit, Pāli or Japanese in such a way that the less well-informed Western readers can grasp their meanings and connotations becomes an hermeneutical task. It is admittedly a delicate balancing act to decide whether to stay close to the (self-understanding of the) portrayed religious tradition or, on the other hand, to strive to enhance the reader's understanding by relying on concepts which have a certain meaning in the target language and culture. Despite this general caveat, Hutter has given us a fair and highly informed account of Buddhism's two and a half thousand years' history, its development and the diversity of its cultural expressions.

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JOHN R. HINNELLS, *Zoroastrian and Parsi Studies. Selected Works of John R. Hinnells*—Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate Publishing Ltd 2000 (430 p.) ISBN 0-7546-1501-4 (cloth) £ 50.00.

“A religion is what it has become. Historians too often describe what the religion was at a given period in past history which they think represents the ‘real’ religion. Theologians commonly depict an idealistic picture of the ‘true’ faith and describe all variations as heresies or the falling away from ‘the valid’ or ‘core’ teaching as lesser manifestations of the religion. The truth is, of course, that all religions change as they evolve and must do so if they are to continue to be meaningful to the practitioner in a changing world” (p. 241). These sentences focus well on Hinnells’ methodological approach to the study of religions in general and Zoroastrianism as his main field of research. 18 articles (originally written between 1968 and 1999) are re-published in this book with the addition of four new introductions to the main sections of the book.

“Postmodernism and the Study of Zoroastrianism” (pp. 7-25) reminds the reader well that every researcher is influenced by his own presuppositions when studying religion. Giving an overview of the main trends of research in Zoroastrianism since the 19th century, H. shows e.g. how Haug’s Lutheran background, Moulton as a Methodist minister or Zaehner’s Catholicism each leave their impact on the description of Zoroastrianism by these authors; and the same is true for more recent authors like Boyce or Shaked. For valuing divergent contributions to Zoroastrian studies I think this article highly important.

Two longer articles focus on “Zoroastrian influence on Biblical imagery.” According to H. such influences mainly occurred during the Parthian period (2nd century BCE to 1st century CE) both in the lands of the Jewish diaspora (Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Parthia) and in Israel proper (p. 38), and because Parthian Zoroastrian (not only Hellenistic) culture was widely spread it is also possible that early Christianity had direct inter-religious contacts with Zoroastrianism and not only indirect via Jewish mediation (p. 71). Speaking of Zoroastrian connections with the Biblical traditions one has to take into account that influence does not primarily mean conscious ‘copying’ of details of Zoroastrian beliefs, but what is “still needed is an extensive study of the contact between Jews and Zoroastrians throughout the diaspora” (p. 85). Then such a study will provide a basis for further high-lighting direct and indirect influences of Zoroastrian thoughts and motifs to Judaism and Christianity.

The following sections of the book concentrate on Parsis proper—their history, their religion and the present diaspora. Parsi wealth during the 19th and 20th century partly depends on commercial relations with the British (cf. pp. 101-16) and also on Parsi education based on British models (cf. pp. 141-73). Against such a “European” background one can observe social changes within Parsi thought and Zoroastrianism; two articles cover these topics (pp. 175-200; 241-75). I just mention the “Protestant dastur” M.N. Dhalla (cf. pp. 187-89; 248-50), whose contribution to intellectual reform of Parsi Zoroastrianism and whose emphasis of the Gathas as the “word of the prophet” have been influenced by his studies at Columbia University under the guidance of the protestant scholar A.W. Jackson; Dhalla’s reform-Zoroastrianism has been held in high esteem during the 20th century by wide circles of learned Parsis in Karachi and Bombay. The focus on the Gathas as “holy scripture” of the prophet provides some links to the Iranian Zoroastrians who within their Islamic context also stress the importance of the book and the written words of Zarathustra as a prophet; but on the other hand, “non-reformed” Parsi Zoroastrians lay their interests to a greater part to the rituals and the priestly knowledge (cf. pp. 269sq.).—Another notable facet is the “theosophical Parsism” of the Ilm-e-Kshnoom (cf. pp. 191-94; 250-56), which originated with B.N. Shroff and which also argued against Dhalla’s “reform party” by maintaining the whole Avesta as the word of the prophet. B. Shroff adapted theosophical ideas by replacing the “masters of eternal wisdom” from their Tibetan setting within the theosophical frame to an Iranian homeland at Mt. Damawand. The masters’ (or better: Shroff’s) interpretation of Zoroastrian cosmology in connection with occultism and careful observation of ritual behaviour is one (but an extreme) example of different ways of thought within Parsi Zoroastrianism. But just as the case with the “reform party” it makes clear that in studying Zoroastrianism we have to be more aware of its divergences than maintaining a—western—presupposition of a static and uniform contemporary religion.<sup>1</sup>

The last four articles concentrate on modern diaspora which started in the 18th century in a Chinese environment (cf. p. 337). This part of the

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<sup>1</sup> I like to notify to the reader also the recently published book by Ph. Kreyenbroek: *Living Zoroastrianism. Urban Parsis speak about their religion*, Richmond: Curzon Press 2001; Kreyenbroek’s book—totally based on interviews with Parsis in India—gives an additional and excellent impression on the varieties of present-day Parsi Zoroastrianism as seen by the members of the community.

book depends on a large degree on interviews and long-term connections of the author with the Parsi diaspora communities worldwide. The situation within these communities can be seen both positive and negative as nearly all interviewees say that they had become more engaged in their religion than in their homeland; but on the other hand there are a bulk of problems still to be overcome (cf. p. 419-24), namely the absence of priests to have rituals properly performed. Other problems are the lack of fire temples, but also social problems with intermarriage and the question whether a non-Zoroastrian partner is allowed to partake in religious ceremonies; further the different socio-cultural contexts of Iranian and Parsi Zoroastrians meeting each other in the diaspora. Despite such current problems the western Zoroastrians “believe that they will play a crucial role in the history of the religion in the third millennium” (p. 429). And that is good reason that further studies in Zoroastrianism will have to concentrate on the “new” countries of the western diaspora (mainly Great Britain, North America, Australia) in the same way as previous studies have done on the “old” countries Iran and India.

In bringing together his widely scattered articles on contemporary Parsis in India and the West the author has done an excellent service to anyone interested in Zoroastrianism because this book shows that this religion despite its antiquity has not lost its constant vigour which—with all its differences that must not be neglected—still is meaningful for its adherents.

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